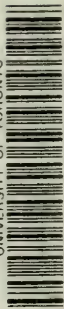
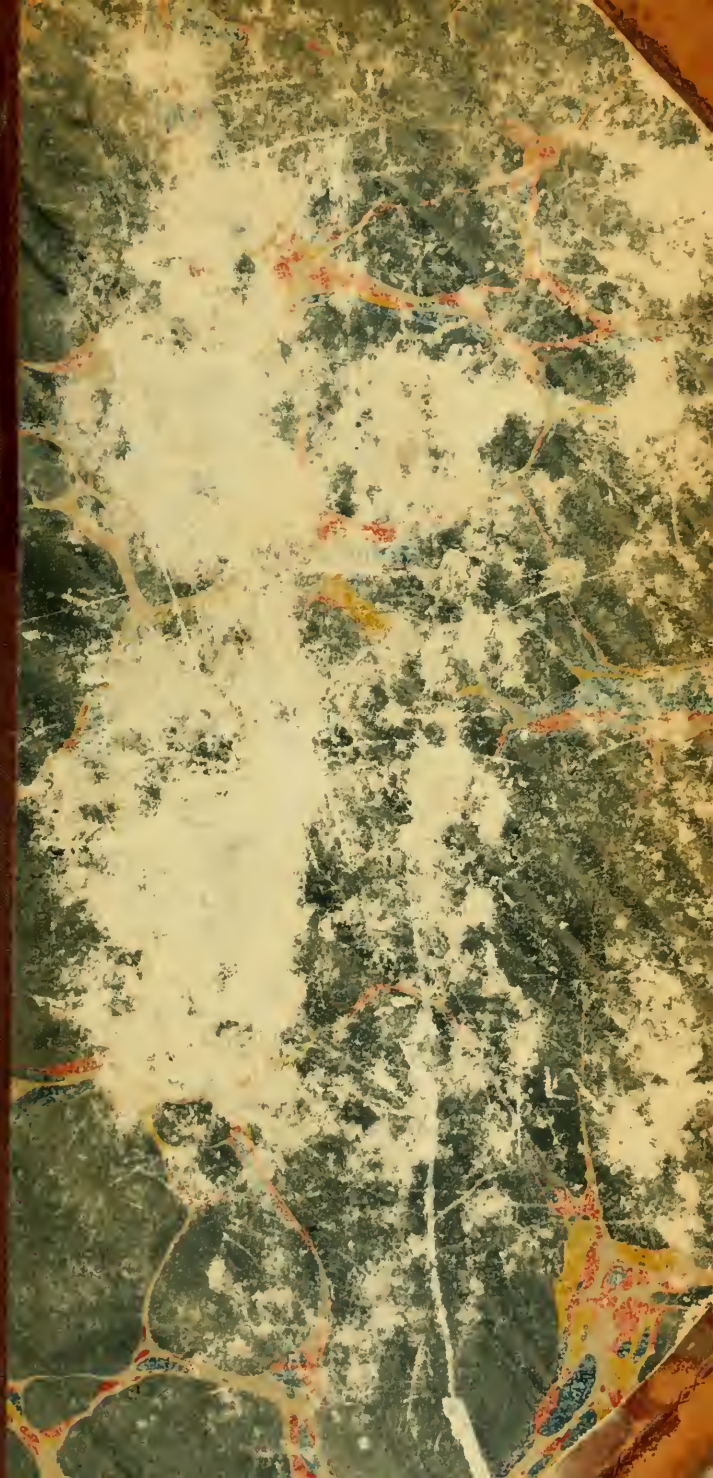


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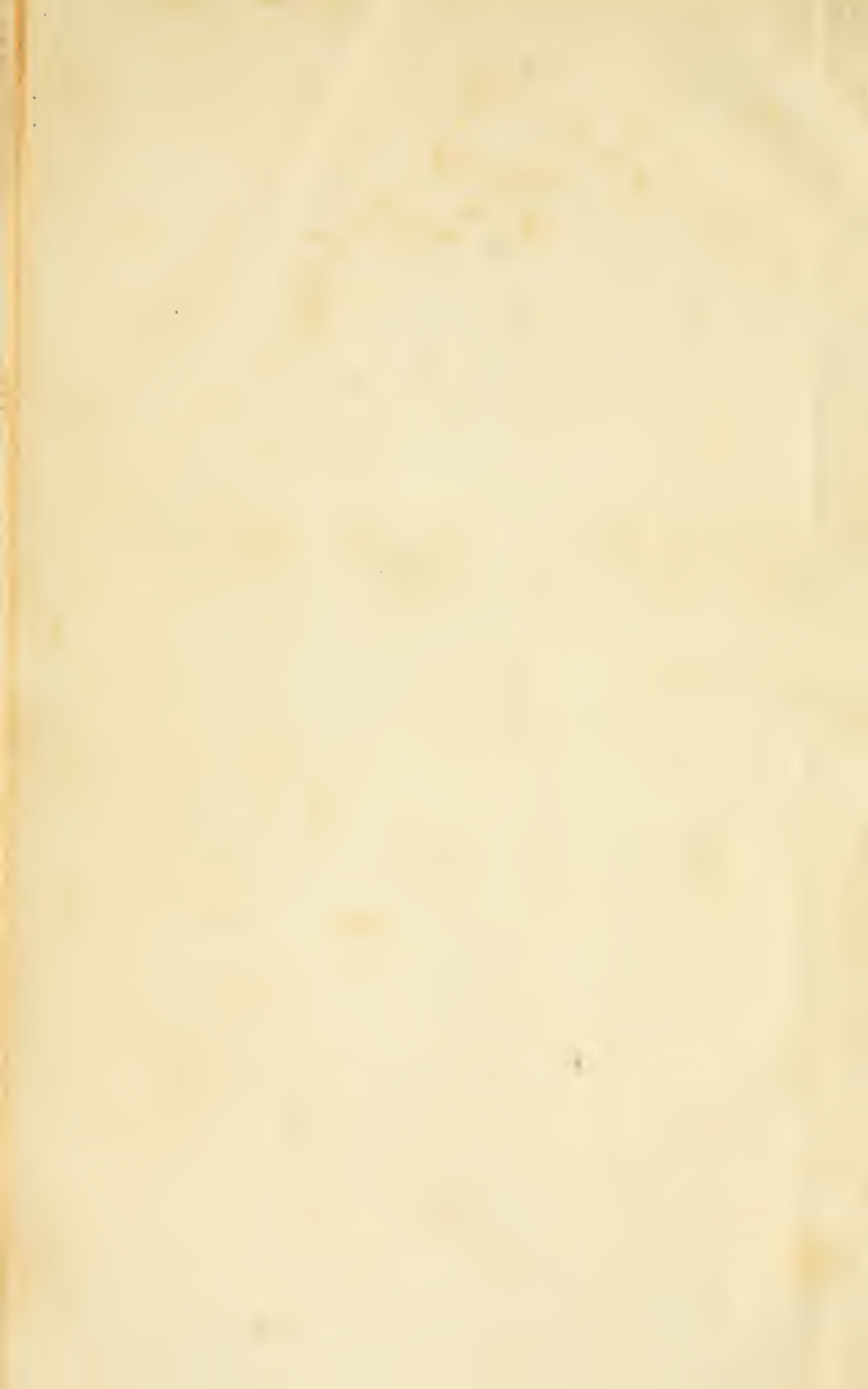








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COURSE OF LECTURES

ON

Dramatic

ART AND LITERATURE,

BY

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL:

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL GERMAN

BY

JOHN BLACK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LECTURES  
ON  
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CONTINUATION OF

LECTURE X.

FRENCH TRAGIC THEATRE.

**A** NEW epoch of French Tragedy begins with *Voltaire*, whose first appearance on the theatre, in his early youth, followed close upon the age of Louis the Fourteenth. I have already, in a general way, alluded to the changes and enlargements which he projected, and partly carried into execution. *Corneille* and *Racine* may be said to have led a true artist's life: they were dramatic poets with their whole soul; their desire, as authors, was confined to that object alone, and all their studies were directed to the stage. But *Voltaire* wished to shine in every possible department; a restless vanity would not allow him to be satisfied with the attempt to attain perfection in any one walk of literature; and from the variety of subjects on which his mind was employed, it was impossible for him to avoid shallow-

ness and immaturity of ideas. To form a correct idea of his relation to his two predecessors in the tragic art, we must institute a comparison between the characteristical features of the preceding classical age and that in which he gave the tone. In the time of Louis the Fourteenth, the traditionary belief respecting the most important concerns of humanity remained undisturbed; and in poetry, the object was not so much to enrich the mind, as to form it by means of a free and noble entertainment. But the want of thinking began at length to be felt: it unfortunately happened, however, that bold presumption hurried far before profound inquiry, and hence the increase of public immorality was followed by a dangerous scepticism, from the ridicule of which no object was sacred, and which shook the foundations of every conviction which had a reference to religion, morals, and the preservation of the social union. Voltaire was by turns philosopher, rhetorician, sophist, and buffoon. The impurity by which his views were in part characterised, was irreconcilable with a complete impartiality in his theatrical career. As he saw the public longing for information, which was rather tolerated by the favour of the great than authorized and formally approved of by the public institutions, he did not fail to meet their wishes, and to deliver, in beautiful verses, on the stage, what no man durst yet preach from the pulpit or the professor's chair. He made use of poetry as a means to accomplish ends which are foreign to it; and this has often polluted the poetical purity of his compositions. In *Mahomet*

he wished to exhibit the dangers of fanaticism, or rather, laying aside all circumlocution, the belief in any revelation whatever. For this purpose, he has most unjustifiably disfigured a great historical character, loaded him in a revolting manner with the most shocking crimes, at the expense of our tortured feelings. As he was universally known as the bitter enemy of Christianity, he bethought himself of a new triumph for his vanity, by making Christian sentiments in *Zaire* and *Alzire* the means of exciting our emotion : and here for once his versatile heart, which was susceptible of a feeling for goodness in momentary ebullitions, shamed the rooted malice of his understanding ; he actually succeeded, and these affecting and religious passages cry out loudly against him for the idle abuse in which his petulant ignorance so often indulged. In England he acquired a knowledge of a freer constitution, and became an enthusiastic admirer of freedom.—Corneille introduced the Roman republicanism and politics in general into his works, for the sake of their poetical energy ; Voltaire again exhibited them under a poetical form, that they might have a political effect on the popular opinion. As he imagined that he was better acquainted with the Greeks than his predecessors, and as he had obtained a slight knowledge of the English theatre and Shakspeare, which were before undiscovered islands for France, he wished in like manner to derive every advantage from them.—He insisted on the seriousness, the severity, and simplicity of the Greeks ; and actually in so far approached them, that he excluded love from various



subjects to which it did not properly belong. He was desirous of reviving the majesty of the Grecian scene ; and here his endeavours had this good effect, that in his theatrical works the eye was no longer so miserably neglected. He borrowed from Shakspeare, as he thought, a boldness of theatrical effect ; but here he was the least successful ; when, in imitation of that great master, he ventured in *Semiramis* to call up a ghost from the other world, he fell into the commission of innumerable absurdities. In a word, he was perpetually making experiments in the dramatic art ; and at different times he availed himself of totally different means for effect. Hence his works have occasionally remained half way between studies and finished productions ; we perceive something unfixed and unfinished in his whole formation. Corneille and Racine are much more perfect within the limits which they have prescribed to themselves ; they are altogether that which they are, and we have no glimpses in their works of any thing of a higher or different description. Voltaire's claims are much more extensive than his means. Corneille has expressed the maxims of heroism with greater sublimity, and Racine the natural emotions with greater sweetness ; but we must allow that Voltaire has introduced the springs of morality with greater effect into the drama, and that he displays a more intimate acquaintance with the original relations of the mind. Hence, in some of his pieces, he is more powerfully affecting than either of the other two.

The first and last only of these three masters of



the French tragic stage may be said to be fruitful; though even this they cannot be accounted, when compared with the Greeks. That Racine was not more prolific, was indeed partly owing to accidental circumstances in his life. He enjoys this advantage, however, that with the exception of his first youthful attempts, the whole of his pieces have kept possession of the stage, and the public estimation. But many of the pieces of Corneille and Voltaire, which even pleased at first, have since disappeared, and are now not even so much as read; on which account, selections from their works have been published under the title of *Chef-d'œuvres*. It is remarkable, that few of the numerous tragical attempts in France have succeeded. Laharpe reckons, that about a thousand tragedies have been acted or printed since the death of Racine, and that about thirty only, besides those of Voltaire, have kept possession of the theatre. Notwithstanding the great competition in this department, the tragical repertory of the French is therefore far from ample. We will not undertake to give a full account of their theatrical stores; and it is still farther from the object of our undertaking to enter into a circumstantial and anatomical investigation of separate pieces. We can only, with a rapid pen, notice the character and relative worth of the most distinguished works of those three masters, and of a few others deserving of favourable mention.

Corneille opened the career of his fame, in the most brilliant manner, with the *Cid*, of which, indeed, the execution alone is his own: the plan of the Spaniard appears to have been closely followed

by him. The *Cid* of Guillen de Castro has never come into my hands, so that it has not been in my power to institute an accurate comparison between the two works. But were we to judge from the specimens produced, the Spanish piece seems to have been written with much greater simplicity than the French; and the subject was first adorned with rhetorical pomp by Corneille. We are ignorant, however, of what he has left out and sacrificed. All the French critics are agreed that the part of the Infanta is superfluous. They do not see, with the Spanish poet, that when a princess, forgetful of her elevated rank, entertains an inclination for Rodrigo, and wishes to distinguish him as the flower of an amiable order of knighthood, this must serve as a stronger justification of the love of Chimene, which so many powerful motives could not overcome. It is true, the passion of the Infanta ought to have been more musically developed, and the deeds of Rodrigo against the Moors more epically, that is, more contemplatively related, to produce that pleasure and general effect for which they were intended; they probably are so in the Spanish. The rapture with which this piece was universally received on its first appearance, a piece which betrays no trace of any ignoble motives, and which is altogether founded on the conflict between the purest feelings of honour, love, and paternal duty, is a strong proof that the romantic spirit was not yet extinguished among spectators who could give themselves up to such natural impressions. This was altogether misunderstood by the learned; they affirmed, with the academy at their

head, that this subject (one of the most beautiful which ever fell to the lot of any poet) was unfit for tragedy ; they censured, in their incapacity of entering historically into another age, many supposed improbabilities and improprieties.\* The *Cid* is certainly not a tragedy in the sense of the antients ; and it was at first called a tragi-comedy by the poet. Would that this had been the only occasion in which the authority of Aristotle has been applied to subjects which do not belong to his jurisdiction !

*The Horatii* has been censured for want of unity :—The murder of the sister and the acquittal of the victorious Roman, is said to be a second action, independent of the combat of the Horatii and Curia-tii. Corneille himself was talked into a persuasion of this. It appears to me, however, that it may admit of the most satisfactory justification. If the murder of Camilla had not made a part of the piece, the women could have had nothing to do in the first acts ; and without the triumph of patriotism over family ties, the combat could not have been an action, but merely an event destitute of tragical intrigue. But it is a real defect, in my opinion, in Corneille, to have represented a public act which was to decide the fate of two states, as taking place altogether *intra privatos parietes*, and to have stripped it of every visible accompaniment. Hence we are to account for the great flatness of the fifth act.—What a different impression would have been pro-

\* Scuderi speaks even of Chimene as a monster, and calls the whole off-hand, “ *ce mechant combat de l’amour et de l’honneur.*” Admirable ! Here was a man acquainted with the romantic,

duced had Horatius been solemnly condemned, in obedience to strict law, in presence of the king and people, and afterwards saved through the tears and entreaties of his father, agreeably to the description of Livy. Moreover, the poet, not satisfied with representing one sister of the Horatii in love with one of the Curiatii, as in history, thought proper to invent the marriage of a sister of the Curiatii to one of the Horatii : and as in the former female the love of country yields to personal inclination, in the latter personal inclination yields to love of country. This occasions a great improbability : for with such a known family connexion, how would men have been selected for the combat who had the most powerful reasons for sparing each other ? Besides, the murder of the sister by the conqueror can only be supportable, if we suppose him in all the boiling confidence of ungovernable youth. Horatius, already a husband, ought to have shown more wisdom and mildness in bearing with his unfortunate sister's language, otherwise he would have been a ferocious savage.

*Cinna* is commonly ranked much higher than *the Horatii* ; although, in the purity of the sentiments, a great falling off from the ideal sphere, in which the action of the two preceding pieces moves, is here perceptible. All is complicated and diseased in a variety of ways. *Cinna's* republicanism is merely the cloak of another passion : he is a tool in the hands of *Emilia*, who, on her part, constantly sacrifices her pretended love to her revenge. The magnanimity of *Augustus* is ambiguous . it appears ra-



ther the caution of a tyrant grown timid through age. The conspiracy is thrust into the back ground with a splendid narration : it does not excite in us that gloomy apprehension which so theatrical an object ought to do. Emilia, the soul of the piece, is called by the witty Balzac, when speaking in praise of the work, "an adorable fury." Yet the furies themselves could be appeased by purification and punishment : but benevolence and generosity are in vain shown to Emilia, whose heart remains insensible to every means of mollification ; the adoration of so unfeminine a creature is hardly pardonable even in a lover. Hence she has no better adorers than Cinna and Maximus, two great villains, whose repentance comes too late to allow us to imagine it sincere.

Here we have the first specimens of that Machiavelian policy, by which the poetry of Corneille was entirely disfigured at an after period, and which is not only repulsive, but also for the most part both clumsy and unsuitable. He flattered himself, that in knowledge of men and the world, in an acquaintance with courts and politics, he surpassed the most clear seeing. With a mind naturally alive to honour, he conceived that he had made himself master "of the murderous doctrine of Machiavel;" and he displays, in a broad and didactic manner, all the knowledge which he had acquired of these arts. He had no suspicion that an unconscientious and selfish policy goes smoothly to work, and always appears under a borrowed guise. If he had been capable of any thing of this kind, he might have taken a lesson from Richelieu.



Of the remaining pieces in which Corneille has painted the Roman freedom and love of dominion, the *Death of Pompey* is the most prominent. It is full, however, of a grandeur which is more dazzling than genuine; and, indeed, we could expect nothing else from a cento of hyperbolical antitheses from Lucan. These bravura flourishes of rhetoric are strung together on the thread of a clumsy plot. The intrigues of Ptolemy, and the ambitious coquetry of his sister Cleopatra, have a miserable appearance by the side of the description of the fate of the great Pompey, the rage-breathing sorrow of his wife, and the magnanimous compassion of Cæsar.—Scarcely has the conqueror performed the last duty to the reluctant shade of his rival, when he pours out his homage at the feet of the beautiful Queen: he is not only in love, but in love with sighs and flames. Cleopatra, on her part, according to the poet's own expression, is desirous, by her love-gogling, of gaining possession of the sceptre of her brother. Cæsar certainly made love, in his own way, to a number of women: but these cynical loves, if represented with any thing like truth, would be most unfit for the stage. Who can refrain from laughing, when Rome, in the speech of Cæsar, implores the *chaste* love of Cleopatra for young Cæsar?

In *Sertorius*, a much later work, Corneille has contrived to make the great Pompey appear little, and the hero ridiculous. Sertorius, on one occasion, exclaims,—

*Que c'est un sort cruel d'aimer par politique!*

This may be applied to the whole of the persons in the piece. They are not in the least in love with one another; but they allow a pretended love to be subservient to political ends. Sertorius, a hardened and grey-haired warrior, acts the lover with the Spanish Queen, Viriata: he puts forward, however, another person, and offers himself to Aristia; as Viriata presses him to marry her on the spot, he begs anxiously for a short delay; Viriata, along with her other elegant phrases, says roundly, that she neither knows love nor hatred; Aristia, the repudiated wife of Pompey, says to him, "Take me back again, or I will marry another;" Pompey beseeches her to wait only till the death of Sylla, whom he dare not offend, without mentioning any thing of the low scoundrel Perpenna. The disposition to this frigidity of soul was perceptible in Corneille, even at an early period; but it increased in an incredible degree in the works of his age.

In *Polyeucte*, Christian sentiments are not unworthily expressed; yet we find in it more superstitious reverence, than fervent enthusiasm for religion: the wonders of grace are rather affirmed, than conceived with mysterious illumination. Both the tone and the situations, in the first acts, incline very much to comedy, as has already been observed by Voltaire. A female, who has married against her inclinations from obedience to her father, who declares both to her lover, who returns when too late, and to her husband, that she still entertains a tenderness for the former, but that she will keep within the bounds of virtue; a vulgar and selfish

father, who is sorry that the first suitor, who has now become the favourite of the Emperor, was not preferred by him as his son-in-law;—all this promises no very high tragical determinations. The divided heart of Paulina is in nature, and consequently does not detract from the interest of the piece. It is generally agreed, that her situation, and the character of Severus, constitute the principal charm of this drama. But the practical magnanimity of this Roman, who has to conquer his passion, throws the renunciation of Polyeucte, which appears to cost him nothing, very much into the shade. A conclusion has been attempted to be drawn from this, that martyrdom is, in general, an unfavourable subject for tragedy. But nothing can be more unjust. The gladness with which martyrs embraced pain and death did not proceed from want of feeling, but from the heroism of the highest love: they must previously, in struggles painful beyond expression, have obtained the victory over every earthly tie; and by the exhibition of these struggles, of these sufferings of our mortal nature, while the seraph takes its flight to heaven, the poet may awaken in us the most fervent emotion. The means by which the catastrophe is brought about in *Polyeucte*, namely, the dull and low artifice of Felix, by which the endeavours of Severus to save his rival contribute to his destruction, are contemptible beyond expression.

How much Corneille delighted in the symmetrical play of antitheses in his intrigues, we may easily see, from his declaring *Rodogune* his favourite work,

I shall content myself with referring to Lessing, who has pleasantly enough exhibited the ridiculous appearance which the two distressed princes cut, with a mother who says, "He who murders his mistress I shall name heir to the throne," and a mistress who says, "He who murders his mother shall be chosen by me for a husband." The best and shortest way of going to work would have been to have locked up the two furies together. Voltaire returns always to the mention of the fifth act, which he declares to be one of the most noble productions of the French stage. This singular way of judging works of art, by which the parts are praised in opposition to the whole, without which it is impossible for them to exist, is altogether foreign to our way of thinking.

With respect to *Heraclius*, Voltaire gives himself the unnecessary labour to show that Calderon did not imitate Corneille; and, on the other hand, he labours, with little success, to deny that the latter had the Spanish author before him, and availed himself of his labours. Corneille, it is true, gives the whole out as his own invention; but we must recollect, that it was only when hard pressed that he acknowledged what he owed to the author of the Spanish *Cid*. The chief circumstance of the plot, namely, the uncertainty of the tyrant Phocas which of the two youths is his own son, or the son of his murdered predecessor, bears great resemblance to that of a drama of Calderon, and nothing of the kind is to be found in history; in other respects the plot is, it is true, altogether different. However this may be, in Calderon the



ingenious boldness of extravagant invention corresponds always with the heightening of the tragical colouring of poetry ; whereas in Corneille, after our head has become giddy in endeavouring to disentangle a complicated and ill-contrived intrigue, we are only recompensed by a succession of tragical epigrams, without the least enjoyment for the fancy.

*Nicomedes* is a political comedy, the dryness of which is hardly in any degree compensated for by the ironical tone which runs throughout the speeches of the hero.

This is nearly all that now appears of Corneille on the stage. His later works are, throughout, merely treatises in a pompous dialogical form, on reasons of state in certain difficult conjunctures.—We might represent a party at chess, as well as a tragedy.

Those who have the patience to labour through the forgotten pieces of Corneille will perceive with astonishment, that they are constructed on the same principles, and, with the exception of negligences of style, executed with the same expense of what he considered art, as his admired productions. For example, *Attila*, in the plot, bears a striking resemblance to *Rodogune*. In his own decisions, it is impossible not to be struck with the very unessential things on which he puts a stress, and that he should never once consider the laying open the depths of the minds and destinies of men, certainly the highest object of tragical composition, as a matter of the slightest concern. In the unfavourable reception which he has frequently to recount, he always finds



some excuse for his self-love, some subsidiary circumstance to which the fate of his piece was to be attributed.

In the two first youthful attempts of Racine, nothing deserves to be remarked, but the flexibility with which he accommodated himself to the limits fixed by Corneille to the career then opened to him. In the *Andromache* he broke loose from them, and first became himself. He expressed the inward struggles and inconsistencies of passion, with a truth and an energy which had never before been heard on the French stage. The fidelity of *Andromache* to the memory of her husband, and her maternal tenderness, are beautifully affecting; even the proud *Hermione* carries us along with her in her wild aberrations. Her aversion to *Orestes*, after he had become the instrument of her revenge, and her awaking from her blind fury to utter helplessness and despair, may almost be called tragically grand. The male parts, as is generally the case with Racine, are not so advantageously drawn. The continual threatenings of *Pyrrhus* to deliver up *Astyanax*, if *Andromache* should not listen to him, with his gallant asseverations, resembles the art of an executioner, who applies the torture to his victim with the most courtly phrases. We have difficulty in conceiving *Orestes*, after his horrible deed, as following in the train of a proud beauty. Not the least mention is made of the murder of his mother; he appears to have completely forgotten it throughout the whole piece: why then do the furies come all at once towards the end? This is a sin-

gular contradiction. The connecting together of the whole bears too great a resemblance to certain sports of children, where one always runs before and tries to surprise the other.

In *Britannicus*, I have already praised the historical fidelity of the picture. Nero, Agrippina, Narcissus, and Burrhus, are so accurately drawn, and finished with such light allusions and such a delicate mixture of colouring, that, in respect to character, it yields, perhaps, to no French tragedy whatever. Racine has here possessed the art of giving us to understand much that is left unsaid, and enabling us to look forward into futurity. I will only censure one inconsistency which has escaped the poet. He paints to us the cruel voluptuary, whom education has only in appearance tamed, when he first breaks loose from the restraints of discipline and virtue. Yet Narcissus, at the close of the fourth act, speaks as if he had even then exhibited himself as a player and a charioteer before the people. He first sunk to this ignominy after being hardened by the commission of grave crimes. To represent the complete Nero, that is, the flattering and cowardly tyrant, in the same person; with the vain and fantastical being who, as poet, singer, player, and almost as juggler, was desirous of admiration, and recited even Homeric verses in the agony of death, could alone be compatible with a mixed drama, in which tragical dignity is not required throughout the whole piece.

To *Berenice*, composed in honour of a virtuous princess, the French critics seem to me, in general,

extremely unjust. It is an idyllic tragedy, no doubt; but it is full of tenderness of mind. No person was more skilled than Racine in throwing a certain veil of dignity over female weakness.—Who can doubt that Berenice has long before given every proof of her tenderness to Titus, though this is carefully veiled over? She is like a Magdalena of Guido, who languishingly repents her renunciation. The chief error of the piece is the tiresome part of Antiochus.

On the first representation of *Bajazet*, Corneille, it seems, was heard to say, these Turks are very much Frenchified. The censure, as is well known, principally attaches to the parts of Bajazet and Atalide. The old Grand Vizier is certainly Turkish enough; and were a Sultana ever to become the Sultan, she would perhaps throw the handkerchief in the same Sultanic manner as the disgusting Roxane. I have already observed that Turkey, in its naked rudeness, could hardly bear representation before a cultivated public. Racine felt this, and merely refined the forms without changing the main incidents. The mutes and the strangling were motives which could hardly be suspected in the seraglio; and so he gives, on several occasions, very elegant circumlocutory descriptions of strangling. This is, however, inconsistent; when people are so familiar with the idea of a thing, they call it also by its true name.

The intrigue of *Mithridate*, as Voltaire has remarked, bears great resemblance to that of the *Miser* of Molière. Two brothers are rivals for the

bride of their father, who cunningly extorts from her the name of her favoured lover, by feigning a wish to renounce in his favour. The confusion of both sons, when they learn that their father, whom they believed dead, is still alive, and will speedily make his appearance, is in reality exceedingly comic.—The one calls out: *Qu'avons nous fait ?* This is the fear of school-boys, when conscious of some impropriety, on the unexpected entrance of their master. The political scene, where Mithridates consults his sons respecting his grand project of conquering Rome, and in which Racine successfully vies with Corneille, is logically interwoven in the plan; but still it is unsuitable to the tone of the whole, and the impression which it is intended to produce. All the interest is centred in Monime: she is one of the amiable creations of Racine, and excites in us a tender commiseration.

On no work of this poet will the sentence of German readers differ more from that of the French critics and their whole public, than *Iphigénie*.—Voltaire declares it the tragedy of all times and all nations, which approaches as near to perfection as is consistent with human endeavours; and in this opinion he is universally followed by his countrymen. But we see in it only a modernised Greek tragedy, of which the manners are inconsistent with the mythological traditions, of which the simplicity is destroyed by the intriguing Eriphile, and in which the amorous Achilles, however contumacious his behaviour, is altogether insupportable. La Harpe affirms that the Achilles of Racine is even more



Homeric than that of Euripides. What shall we say to this? Before acquiescing in the sentences of such critics, we must first forget the Greeks.

Respecting *Phedre* I may express myself with the greater brevity, as I have already dedicated a separate treatise to that tragedy. However much Racine may have borrowed from Euripides and Seneca, and however much he may have spoiled the former and not improved the latter, yet still it was a great step from the affected mannerism of his age to a more genuine tragic style. When we compare it with the *Phædra* of Pradon, which was so well received by his contemporaries for no other reason than because no trace whatever of the ancients was discernible in it, but every thing reduced to the scale of a fashionable miniature portrait for a toilette, we must entertain the higher admiration of the poet who had such a strong feeling for the ancient poets, who had the courage to connect himself with them, and who dared to display so much purity and unaffected simplicity, in an age of which the prevailing taste was every way vitiated and unnatural. If Racine actually said, that the only difference between his *Phædra* and that of Pradon was, that he knew how to write, he did himself the most crying injustice, and must have allowed himself to be blinded by the miserable doctrine of his friend Boileau, which made the essence of poetry to consist in diction and versification, instead of the display of imagination and fancy.

The two last pieces of Racine belong, as is well known, to a very different epoch of his life: they



were both written at the instigation of the same person; but they are extremely dissimilar to each other. *Esther* scarcely merits the name of a tragedy; written for the entertainment of well-bred young women in a pious seminary, it does not rise much beyond its destination. It had however a most astonishing success. The invitation to the representations in St. Cyr was looked upon as a court favour; flattery and scandal delighted to discover allusions throughout the piece; Ahasuerus was said to represent Louis the Fourteenth; Esther, Madame de Maintenon; the proud Vasti, who is only incidentally alluded to, Madame de Montespan; and Haman, the minister Louvois. This is certainly rather a profane application of the sacred history, if we can suppose the poet to have had any such object in view. In *Athalie*, however, he exhibited himself for the last time, before taking leave of poetry and the world, in his whole strength. It is not only his most finished work, but I have no hesitation in declaring it, of all the French tragedies, to be the only one which, free from all mannerism, approaches the most to the grand style of the Greeks. The chorus is fully in the sense of the ancients, though introduced in a different manner for the sake of suiting our music, and the different arrangement of our theatre. The scene has all the majesty of a public action. Expectation, emotion, and keen agitation succeed each other, and always rise with the progress of the drama: in the severe abstinence from every thing foreign, there is a display of the richest variety;

sometimes of sweetness, but more frequently of majesty and grandeur. The inspiration of the prophet elevates the fancy to flights of more than usual boldness. The signification is that which a religious drama ought to have: on earth, the struggle between good and evil; and in heaven, the wakeful eye of providence darting down rays of decision from unapproachable glory. All is animated by one breath; by the pious inspiration of the poet; of the genuineness of which, neither his life nor this work will allow us to entertain a doubt. This is the very thing in which so many pretended works of art of the French are deficient: the authors have not been inspired by a fervent love for their subject, but the desire of external effect; and hence the vanity of the artist every where breaks forth, and throws a damp over our feelings.

The unfortunate fate of this piece is well known. Scruples of conscience respecting the impropriety of all theatrical representations (which appear to be exclusively entertained by the Gallican church, for both in Italy and Spain men of religion and piety have thought very differently on this subject) prevented the representation in St. Cyr; it appeared in print, and was universally abused and reprobated; and this state of things continued long even after the death of Racine. So incapable of every thing serious was the puerile taste of that age.

Among the poets of the period in question, the *younger Corneille* deserves to be mentioned, who sought less to excite astonishment by heroism, like his brother, than to gain over the favour of the

spectators by "those tendernesses which give so much pleasure," in the words of Pradon. Of his numerous tragedies, two only, the *Comte d'Essea* and *Ariadné*, keep possession of the stage; the rest are consigned to oblivion. The latter, composed after the model of *Berenice*, is a tragedy of which the catastrophe may, properly speaking, be said to consist in a swoon. The situation of the resigned and enamoured Ariadne, who, after all her sacrifices, sees herself abandoned by Theseus and betrayed by her own sister, is expressed with great truth of feeling. Whenever an actress, with a prepossessing figure and sweet voice, appears in this character, she is sure to excite our interest. The other parts, the cold and deceitful Theseus, the intriguing Phædra, who continues her deception towards her confiding sister to the last, the procuring Pirithous, and King Œnarus, who incessantly offers himself to supply the place of the faithless lover, are all too pitiful, and frequently even laughable. Moreover, the desert rocks of Naxos are here smoothed down to modern drawing-rooms; and the princes who people them seek, in a polished manner, to out-wit each other, and to whisper their soft things to the unfortunate princess, who alone has any thing like pretensions to nature.

*Crebillon*, in point of time, comes between Racine and Voltaire, though he was also the rival of the latter. A numerous party wished to oppose him, when far advanced in years, to Voltaire, and even to give him a much higher place. Nothing,

however, but the utmost rancour of party, or the utmost depravity of taste, or, what is most probable, the two together, could lead them to such signal injustice. Far from having contributed to the purification of the tragic art, he evidently attached himself, not to the better, but the affected authors of the age of Louis the Fourteenth. In his total ignorance of the ancients, he has the arrogance to rank himself above them. His favourite books were the antiquated romances of a Calprenede, and others of a similar stamp: from these he derived his extravagant and ill connected plots. One of the means to which he every where has recourse, is the unconscious or intentional disguise of the principal characters under the names of others; the first example of which was given in *Heraclius*.—Thus, Orestes in his *Electra* first becomes known to himself towards the middle of the piece. The brother and sister, and a son and daughter of Ægisthus are nearly exclusively occupied with their double amours, which neither contribute to, nor injure, the main action; and Clytemnestra is killed by a wound from Orestes, who does not know her, inflicted against his will. He abounds in extravagances of every kind; of which the impudence of *Semiramis* in persisting in her love, after she learns that the object of it is her own son, may be mentioned as one instance. A few empty ravings and common-place displays of terror, have gained for Crebillon the appellation of the *terrible*, which may afford us a standard for the barbarous and affected taste of the age, and the infinite distance



from nature and truth to which they had then fallen. It is as if, in painting, we should give to Coypel the appellation of the majestic.

To *Voltaire*, from his first entrance on his dramatic career, we must allow both the conviction that higher and more extensive efforts remained to be made, and the zeal to execute what was yet undone. How far he was successful, and how much he was himself blinded by the national prejudices against which he contended, is another question. For the more easy review of his works, it will be useful to rank together the pieces in which he handled mythological materials, and those which he derived from the Roman history.

His earliest tragedy, *Œdipe*, is a mixture of approximation to the Greeks\* (with the exception, as may be supposed, of doing better), and of compliance with the prevailing manner. The best traits Voltaire owed to Sophocles, whom he slanders in his preface; and in comparison with whose catastrophe his own is flat in the extreme. Not a little, however, was transferred by him from the frigid *Œdipus* of Corneille into his own; and

\* His admiration of them seems to have been more derived from foreign influence than from individual study. He relates in his letter to the Duchess of Maine, prefixed to *Oreste*, that in his early youth he had access to a princely house where they used to read Sophocles, and make extemporary translations from him, and where there were men who acknowledged the superiority of the Greek Theatre over the French. We should in vain seek for such men in France in the present day, among people of any distinction, from the universal depreciation of the study of the classics.



more especially the love of Philoctetus to Jocaste, which may be said to correspond nearly with that of Theseus and Dirce in Corneille. Voltaire acknowledged in his defence the tyranny of the players, from which a young and unknown writer cannot withdraw himself. We may remark the frequent allusions to priests, superstition, &c. which even at that early period betray the future direction of his mind.

In *Merope*, a work of his ripest years, he intended to give us a perfect example of the revival of the Greek tragedy, an undertaking of so great difficulty, and so long announced with every kind of preparation. Its real merit is the exclusion of the traditional love scenes (of which, however, Racine had already given an example in the *Athalie*); for in other respects, we hardly need to put German readers in mind how much of it is not conceived in the true Grecian spirit. The confidants are also entirely after the old cut. The other defects of the piece have been circumstantially, and, I might almost say, much too severely, censured by Lessing. The tragedy of *Merope* can hardly fail of a certain degree of favour, if well represented. This is owing to the nature of the subject. The passionate love of a mother, in dread lest she should lose her only good, threatened with oppression, supporting her trials with heroic constancy, and at last triumphant, is altogether a picture of such truth and beauty, that the compassion becomes beneficent, and remains free from every painful ingredient. Still we must not forget that the piece

belongs only in a very limited manner to Voltaire. How much he has borrowed, and not always changed for the better, from *Maffei*, has been also shown by Lessing.

Among the transformations of Greek tragedies, *Oreste*, the latest, appears to me the most remote from the antique simplicity and severity, although it is free from any mixture of love, and mere confidants are avoided. That Orestes should undertake to destroy Ægisthus is nowise singular, and merited no such strong delineation in the tragical annals of the world. It is the case which Aristotle lays down as the most indifferent, where one enemy knowingly attacks the other. And here neither Orestes nor Electra have any thing farther in view: Clytemnestra is to be spared; no oracle consigns to her own son the execution of the punishment due to her guilt. But even the deed in question is hardly executed by Orestes himself: he goes to Ægisthus, falls, we may well say, simply enough into the net, and is only saved by an insurrection of the people. According to the ancients, he was commanded by the oracle to attack the criminals with cunning, as they had so attacked Agamemnon. This was just retaliation: to fall in open conflict would have been too honourable a death for Ægisthus. Voltaire has added, of his own invention, that he was also prohibited by the oracle from revealing himself to his sister; and, as carried away by fraternal love, he breaks this injunction, he is blinded by the furies, and involuntarily perpetrates the maternal murder. These are certainly

wonderful ideas to assign to the gods, and a most unexampled punishment for a slight, nay, even a noble crime. The incidental and unintentional stabbing of Clytemnestra was borrowed by Voltaire from Crebillon. A French writer will hardly ever venture to represent this subject with mythological truth; namely, the murder as intentional, and executed at the command of the gods. Should Clytemnestra be described not as rejoicing in the success of her crime, but repentant and softened by her maternal love, her death, it is true, could no longer be supportable. But how does this apply to a crime perpetrated with so much premeditation? By such a transition to what is little, the whole significance of the dreadful example is lost.

As the French are in general better acquainted with the Romans than the Greeks, we might expect the Roman pieces of Voltaire to be more consistent, in a political point of view, with historical truth, than his Greek pieces are with the symbolical nature of mythology. This is only the case however in *Brutus*, the earliest of them, and the only one which can be said to be sensibly planned. Voltaire sketched this tragedy in England; he had learned from *Julius Cæsar* the effect which the publicity of republican transactions is capable of producing on the stage, and he wished therefore to hold, in some degree, a middle course between Corneille and Shakspeare. The first act opens majestically; the catastrophe is brief but striking, and the principles of genuine freedom are uniformly pronounced with a flowing eloquence. Brutus himself, his son

Titus, the ambassador of the king, and the chief of the conspirators, are admirably depicted. I am by no means disposed to censure the introduction of love into this play. The passion of Titus for a daughter of Tarquin, which constitutes the knot, is not improbable, and in its tone harmonizes with the manners which are depicted. Still less am I disposed to agree with La Harpe, when he says that Tullia ought to display proud and heroic sentiments, like Emilia in *Cinna*, to serve as a counterpoise to the republican virtues. By what means can a noble youth be more easily seduced than by female tenderness and modesty? It is not, generally speaking, natural that a being like Emilia should give rise to love.

The *Mort de César* is a mutilated tragedy: it ends with the speech of Antony over the dead body of Cæsar, borrowed from Shakspeare; that is, it has no conclusion. What a patched and bungling appearance it exhibits in all its parts! What a coarse-spun, hurried, and lame conspiracy! How stupid Cæsar must have been, had he allowed the conspirators to brave him before his face without suspecting any thing of their design! That Brutus, although he knew Cæsar to be his father, nay, immediately after this came to his knowledge, should join in his assassination, is cruel, and, at the same time, highly unlike a Roman. History affords us many examples of fathers in Rome who condemned their own sons to death for crimes of state; the law gave fathers an unlimited power of life and death over their children in their own houses. But the



in murder of a father, though undertaken for the recovery of freedom, would have stamped the perpetrator, in the eyes of the Romans, as an unnatural monster. The inconsistencies which are here produced by the attempt to observe the unity of place, are obvious to the least discerning eye. The scene is said to be in the Capitol; here the conspiracy is formed in clear day light, and Cæsar goes out and in during the time. But the people do not appear to know rightly themselves where they are; for Cæsar on one occasion exclaims, *Courons au Capitole!*

The same improprieties are repeated in *Catiline*, which is but a very little better than the preceding piece. From Voltaire's sentiments respecting the dramatic exhibition of a conspiracy, which I quoted in the foregoing Lecture, we might well conclude that, even if it were not evident that with the French system a genuine representation of such a transaction is hardly possible, he was altogether unacquainted with its true nature; not only from the observance of the rules of place and time, but also on account of the dignity of poetical expression insisted on, which is incompatible with the accurate mention of particular circumstances, on which, however, the whole depends. The machinations of a conspiracy, and the endeavours to frustrate them, are like works under ground, in which the besiegers and besieged endeavour to blow one another up.—Something must be done to enable the spectators to comprehend the art of the miners. If Cataline and his adherents had employed no more art and dissimulation, and Cicero no more determined wisdom



than Voltaire has given them, the one could not have endangered Rome, and the other could not have saved it. The piece turns always round on the same point; they all exclaim against one another, but no one acts; and at the conclusion the affair is decided as if by accident, by the blind chance of war. When we read the simple relation of Sallust, it has the appearance of the genuine poetry of the object, and Voltaire's work by the side of it looks like a piece of school rhetoric. Ben Jonson has treated the subject with a very different insight into the true connexion of human affairs; and Voltaire might have learned a great deal from the man whom he employed falsehoods in translating.

The *Triumvirat* belongs to the attempts of his age which are generally allowed to have been unsuccessful. It consists of endless declamations on the subject of proscription, poorly supported by a mere show of action. Here we find the triumvirs quietly sitting in their tents on an island in the small river Rhenus, during the raging of storms, earthquakes, and volcanoes; and Julia and the young Pompeius are shown as if shipwrecked on the strand, although they are travelling on terra firma; besides a number of other puerilities. Voltaire, probably by way of apology for the poor success which the piece had on its representation, says, "This piece is perhaps in the English taste."—Heaven forbid!

We return to the earlier tragedies of Voltaire, in which he brought on the stage subjects never before

attempted, and on which his fame as a dramatic poet principally rests: *Zaire*, *Alzire*, *Mahomet*, *Semiramis*, and *Tancred*.

*Zaire* is considered in France as the triumph of tragic poetry in the representation of love and jealousy. We will not assert with Lessing, that Voltaire was acquainted only with the *legal* style of love. He often expresses feeling with a fiery strength, if not with that familiar truth and *naïveté* in which an unreserved heart lays itself open. But I see no trace of the oriental colouring in the mode of feeling of *Zaire*: educated in the seraglio, she should cling to the object of her passion with all the fervour of a maiden of a glowing imagination, rioting, as it were, in the fragrant perfumes of the East. Her fanciless love dwells solely in the heart; and how can we reconcile that with such an object? Orosman, on his part, lays claim indeed to European tenderness of feeling; but the Tartar is merely varnished over in him, and he has frequent relapses into his ungovernable fury and despotic habits. The poet ought at least to have given a credibility to the magnanimity which he ascribes to him, by investing him with a celebrated historical name, such as that of the Saracen monarch Saladin, well known for his nobleness and liberality of sentiment. But all our favour inclines to the oppressed Christian and chivalrous side, and the glorious names which it exhibits. What can be more affecting than the royal martyr Lusignan, the upright and pious Nerestan, who, in the fire of youth, confines his endeavours to the redemption

of the associates of his belief? The scenes in which they appear are uniformly excellent, and more particularly the whole of the second act. The idea of connecting the discovery of a daughter with her conversion can never be sufficiently praised. But the great effect of this act is, in my opinion, injurious to the rest of the piece. Does any person seriously wish the union of Zaire with Orosman, except spectatresses who are flattered with the homage which is here paid to beauty, or spectators who are still entangled in the follies of youth? Can the feeling of others go along with the poet, when Zaire's love, so ill justified by the act of the Sultan, balances in her soul the voice of blood, and the most sacred claims of filial duty, honour, and religion?

It was a meritorious daring (such singular prejudices then prevailed in France) to exhibit French heroes in *Zaire*. In *Alzire* Voltaire went still farther, and treated a subject in modern history never yet touched by his countrymen. In the former piece he contrasted the chivalrous and Saracenic way of thinking; in this we have Spaniards opposed to Peruvians. The difference between the old and new world has given rise to descriptions of a true poetical nature. However the action may be invented, I find in this piece more historical and more of what we may call symbolical truth, than in most French tragedies. Zamor is a representation of the savage in his free, and Monteze in his subdued state; Guzman, of the arrogance of the conqueror; and Alvarez, of the mild influence of

Christianity. *Alzire* remains between these conflicting elements in an affecting struggle betwixt attachment to her country, its manners, and the first choice of her heart, on the one part, and new bands of honour and duty on the other. All human motives speak in favour of the love of *Alzire*, and against that of *Zaire*. The last scene, where the dying *Guzman* is dragged in, is beneficently overpowering. The noble lines on the diversity of religions, with which *Zamor* is converted by *Guzman*, are borrowed from an event in history: they are the words of the Duke of Guise to a protestant who wished to kill him; but the honour of the poet is not the less in applying them as he has done. In short, notwithstanding the improbabilities in the plot, which are easily discovered, and have often been censured, *Alzire* appears to me the most fortunate attempt, the most finished of all the compositions of Voltaire.

In *Mahomet*, impurity of purpose has been dreadfully revenged, on the artist. He may affirm as much as he pleases that his intentions were solely directed against fanaticism; there can be no doubt that he wished to destroy the belief in any revelation, and that he considered every means allowable for that object. We have thus a work which is productive of effect; but an alarmingly painful effect, equally repugnant to humanity, philosophy, and religious feeling. The *Mahomet* of Voltaire makes two innocent young persons, a brother and sister, who childishly adore him as a messenger from God, unconsciously murder their own father, and this



from the motives of an incestuous love in which they had also become unknowingly entangled by his consent; the brother, after he has blindly executed his horrible mission, he rewards with poison, and the sister he reserves for the gratification of his nauseous lust. This web of atrocities, this cold-blooded delight in wickedness, exceeds perhaps the measure of human nature; but, at all events, it exceeds the bounds of poetic exhibition, even though such a monster should ever have appeared in the course of ages. But, overlooking this, what a disfiguration, nay, even distortion, of history! He has stripped her of her wonderful charms; not a trace of oriental colouring is to be found. Mahomet was a false prophet, but most certainly an enthusiastic and inspired one, otherwise he would never by his doctrine have revolutionized the half of the world. What an absurdity to make him merely a cool deceiver! One alone of the many sublime maxims of the Koran would be sufficient to annihilate the whole of these incongruous inventions.

*Semiramis* is a motley patchwork of the French manner and mistaken imitation. It has something of *Hamlet*, and something of *Clytemnestra* and *Orestes*; but nothing of any of them as it ought to be. The love to an unknown son is borrowed from the *Semiramis* of Crebillon. The appearance of Ninus is a mixture of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and the shadow of Darius in *Æschylus*. That it is superfluous has been admitted by the French critics themselves. Lessing, with his raillery, has scared



away the Ghost. With a great deal of abuse against the behaviour of ordinary ghosts, it has this peculiar to itself, that its speeches are dreadfully bombastic. Notwithstanding the great zeal displayed by Voltaire against subordinate love intrigues in tragedy, he has, however, contrived to exhibit two pairs of lovers, the *partie carrée* as it is called, in this play, which was to be the foundation of an entirely new species.

Since the *Cid* no French tragedy had appeared, of which the plot was founded on such pure motives of honour and love without any ignoble intermixtures, and so completely consecrated to the exhibition of chivalrous sentiments, as *Tancred*. *Amenaide*, though honour and life are at stake, disdains to exculpate herself by a declaration which would endanger her lover; and Tancred, though justified in esteeming her faithless, defends her in single combat, and seeks in despair the death of a hero, when the unfortunate error clears up. So far the piece is irreproachable, and deserving of the greatest praise. But it is weakened by other imperfections. It is of great detriment to its perspicuity, that we cannot at the very first hear the letter without superscription, which occasions all the embarrassment, and that it is not sent off before our eyes. The political disquisitions in the first act are tedious; Tancred appears in the third act for the first time, and he is impatiently expected to give animation to the scene. The furious imprecations of *Amenaide* at the conclusion are not in harmony with the deep but soft emotion with which we are overpowered by

the re-union of two lovers, who have mistaken each other, in the moment of their separation by death.

It might be considered allowable in Voltaire in the earlier piece of the *Orphelin de la Chine* to represent the great Dschingis-kan in love. This drama ought to be called the *Conquest of China*, with the conversion of the cruel Khan of Tartary, &c. The whole of the interest is concentrated in two children whom we never once see. The Chinese are represented as the most virtuous and wise of all mankind, and overflow with philosophical maxims. As Corneille in his old age made one and all of his characters politicians, Voltaire in like manner furnished out his with philosophy, and availed himself of them to preach up his favourite opinions. He was not deterred by the example of Corneille, when the power of representing the passions was extinguished, from bringing to light a number of weak and faulty productions.

Since the time of Voltaire the constitution of the French stage has remained nearly the same. No talent has yet arisen sufficiently powerful to advance the art a step farther, and to refute, by a victorious result, their superannuated prejudices. Many attempts have been made, but they generally follow in the tract of what has already been done, without surpassing it. The endeavour to introduce more historical extent into dramatic composition is frustrated by the traditional limitations and restraints. Of the attacks both theoretical and practical which have been made in France itself on the prevailing system of rules, it will be the most suit-

able time to deliver a few observations when we review the present condition of the French stage, after considering their comedy and the other secondary kinds of dramatic works; as attempts have either been made to found new species, or, in an arbitrary manner, to overturn the divisions which have hitherto been established between them.

## LECTURE XI.

French Comedy.—Molière.—Criticism of his works.—Scarron, Boursault, Regnard ; Comedies in the time of the Regency ; Marivaux and Destouches ; Piron and Gresset.—Later attempts.—The heroic opera : Quinault.—Operettes and Vaudevilles.—Diderot's attempted change of the theatre.—The weeping drama.—Beaumarchais.—Melo-dramas.—Merits and defects of the histrionic art.

**THE** same system of rules and proprieties, which I have endeavoured to show must inevitably have a narrowing influence on tragedy, has been applied to comedy in France much more advantageously. For this mixed composition has, as we have already seen, an unpoetical side ; and some degree of artificial constraint, if not altogether essential to the new comedy, is certainly beneficial to it ; for if it is treated with too negligent a latitude, it runs a risk in respect of general structure, shapelessness, and representation of individual peculiarities, of falling into every day common place. In the French as well as the Grecian language, it happens that the same syllabic measure is used in tragedy and comedy, which on a first view may appear singular. But if the *Alexandrine* did not appear to us peculiarly adapted to the free imitative expression of pathos, on the other hand it must be owned, that a comical effect is produced by the ap-

plication of so symmetrical a measure to the familiar turns of dialogue. The narrowing grammatical conscientiousness of the French poetry is fully suited to comedy, where the versification is not purchased at the expence of resemblance to the language of conversation, where it is not intended to elevate the dialogue by sublimity and dignity above real life, but merely to communicate to it a more elegant ease and lightness. Hence the opinion of the French, who hold a comedy in verse in much higher estimation than a comedy in prose, seems to me to admit of a good justification.

I endeavoured to show that the unities of place and time are inconsistent with the essence of many tragical subjects, because a comprehensive action is frequently carried on in distant places at the same time, and because great determinations can only be slowly prepared. This is not the case in comedy: here the intrigue ought to prevail, the activity of which quickly advances towards its object; and hence the unity of time comes to be almost naturally observed. The domestic and social circles in which the new comedy moves are usually assembled in one place, and consequently the poet is not under the necessity of sending our imagination abroad: only it might have been as well, perhaps, not to interpret the unity of place so very strictly as not to allow the transition from one room to another, or to different houses of the same town. The choice of the scene on the street, a practice in which the Latin comic writers were frequently followed in the earlier times of modern comedy, is very irreconcil-



able with our way of living, and the more deserving of censure, as in the case of the ancients it was an inconvenience which arose from the construction of their theatre.

According to the French critics, and the opinion which has become prevalent through them, Molière alone, of all their comic writers, is classical; and all that has been done since his time, is merely estimated as a more or less perfect approximation to this supposed pattern of an excellence which can never be surpassed, nor even equalled. Hence we shall first proceed to characterize this founder of the French comedy, and then give a short sketch of its progress after his time.

Molière has produced works in so many departments, and of such various worth, that we should hardly be enabled to recognize the same founder in all of them; and yet it is usual, when speaking of his peculiarities and merits, and the advance made by him in his art, to throw the whole of his labours into one mass.

Born and educated in an inferior rank, he enjoyed the advantage of becoming acquainted with the modes of living of the industrious part of the community\* from his own experience, and of acquiring the talent of imitating low modes of expression.—At an after period, when Louis XIV. took him

\* *Bürgerliche Leben* (*bourgeois*).—I have translated this by a circumlocution: we have no privileged casts in this country, and consequently our language has no single expression equivalent to *bourgeois*, which includes, it is believed, all the unprivileged classes in cities and towns.—*Trans.*

into his service, he had opportunities, although from a subordinate station, of narrowly observing the court. He was an actor, and it would appear of peculiar strength in overcharged and farcical comic parts; so little was he prepossessed with prejudices of personal dignity, that he renounced all the conditions by which it was accompanied, and was ever ready to deal out or to receive the blows which were then so frequent on the stage. Nay, his mimetic zeal went so far, that he actually drew his last breath in representing his imaginary patient, and became, in the truest sense, a martyr to the laughter of others. His business was to invent all manner of pleasant entertainments for the court, and by way of relaxation from his state affairs or warlike undertakings, to provoke "the greatest king of the world" to laughter. One would think, on the triumphant return from a glorious campaign, this might have been accomplished in a more refined manner than by the representation of the nauseous condition of an imaginary patient; but Louis XIV. was not so fastidious: he was very well contented with the buffoon whom he protected, and even exhibited his own elevated person occasionally in dances in his ballets. This external situation of Molière was the cause that many of his labours had their origin as mere occasional pieces in the commands of the court; and they bear accordingly the stamp of that origin. Without travelling out of France, he had opportunities of becoming acquainted with the *lazzis* of the Italian comic masks on the Italian theatre at Paris, where

improvisatory dialogues were intermixed with scenes written in French: in the Spanish comedies he studied the ingenious complications of intrigue: Plautus and Terence taught him the salt of the Attic wit, the genuine tone of comic maxims, and nice delineations of character. All this he employed with more or less success in the exigency of the moment, and made use also of all manner of means foreign to his art, to dress out his drama in a sprightly and diversified manner: the allegorical acts of the opera prologues, musical intermezzos, in which he even introduced Italian and Spanish national music, with texts in their own language; at one time sumptuous, and at another grotesque ballets, and even sometimes mere vaulting. He knew how to draw advantage from every thing: the censure passed upon his pieces, the defective manners of rival actors imitated to deception by himself and his company, and even the embarrassment in not being able to produce a theatrical entertainment so quickly as it was demanded by the king, all became for him a matter of amusement. His pieces borrowed from the Spanish, his pastorals and tragi-comedies merely calculated to please the eye, and three or four comedies besides of his earlier days, which are even versified, and consequently carefully laboured, the critics give up without more ado. But even in the farces with or without ballets and intermezzos, in which the overcharged, and frequently the self-conscious and arbitrary comic of buffoonery prevails, Molière has exhibited an inexhaustible store of good humour, scattered excellent jokes

with a lavish hand, and drawn the most amusing caricatures with a bold and vigorous hand; all this, however, has been often done before his time, and I cannot see how in this department he can stand alone as a creative and altogether original artist. For example; is the braggadocio officer of Plautus less meritorious in grotesque characterisation than the *bourgeois gentilhomme*? We shall immediately examine, in a brief manner, whether Molière has actually improved the pieces which he borrowed in whole or in part from Plautus and Terence. When we bear in mind that in these Latin authors we have only a faint and faded copy of the new Attic comedy, we shall then be enabled to judge whether he would have been able to surpass its masters in case they had come down to us. Many of his inventions I am induced to suspect as borrowed, and I am convinced that we should discover the source were we to search into the antiquities of farcical literature.\* Others are so obvious, and have so often been both used and abused, that they may in some measure be considered as the common good of comedy.—Such is the scene in the *Malade Imaginaire*, where the love of the wife is put to the test by the supposed death of the husband, an old joke which our

\* The learned *Tiraboschi* (*Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, Lib. III. § 25.) attests this in very strong expressions:—"Molière," says he, "has made so much use of the Italian comic writers, that were we to take from him all that he has taken from others, the volumes of his comedies would be very much reduced in bulk."



*Hans Sachs* has handled drolly enough.\* We have a declaration of Molière, from which it would appear that he entertained no very conscientious sentiments respecting plagiarism. In the undignified relations in which he lived, and in which every thing was so much calculated for dazzling show, that his name did not even legally belong to him, we are the less to wonder at this.

When Molière in his farcical pieces did not lean on foreign invention, he however appropriated to himself the comic manner of other countries, and more particularly that of the Italian buffoonery. He wished to introduce a sort of masked characters without masks, who should recur with the same name. They have never however been able to become properly domiciliated in France; because the flexible national character of the French, which imitates every mode that is prevalent for the time, is incompatible with that odd originality of exterior to which humorsome and singular individuals give themselves carelessly up in other nations, where all are not modelled by the social tone after the same manner. As the *Sganarelles*, *Mascarilles*, *Scapins*, and *Crispins*, have been allowed to retain their uniform, that every thing like consistency may not

\* I know not whether it has been already remarked that the idea which constitutes the foundation of the *Marriage Forcé* is borrowed from *Rabelais*; in whom Panurge enters upon the very same consultation respecting his future marriage, and receives from Pantagruel just such a sceptical answer as Sganarelle does from the second philosopher.

be lost, they are now completely obsolete on the stage. The French taste is, generally speaking, very little inclined to the self-conscious, drolly-exaggerating, and arbitrary comic; because these descriptions of the comic speak more to the fancy than the understanding. We do not mean to censure this, nor to quarrel about the respective merits of the different species. The low estimation in which the former are held may perhaps contribute the more to the success of the comic of observation. And in fact the French comic writers have here displayed a great deal of refinement and ingenuity: in this consists the great merit of Molière, and it is certainly very distinguished. We may only ask, whether it is of such a description as to justify the French critics, on account of half a dozen of regular comedies as they are called of Molière, in holding the whole of the stores of other nations in refined and characteristic delineation in such infinite contempt as they do, and in setting up him as the comic genius who has never been equalled.

If the praise bestowed by the French on their tragic writers be, from national vanity and ignorance of the mental productions of other nations, exceedingly extravagant, in their praise of Molière they express themselves also in a manner out of all proportion with the object. Voltaire calls him the father of genuine comedy; and this may be true enough with respect to France. According to Laharpe, comedy and Molière are synonymous terms; he is the first of all moral philosophers, his works are the school of the world. Chamfort calls him the

most amiable teacher of humanity since Socrates ; and is of opinion that Julius Cæsar who called Terence a half Menander, would have called Menander a half Molière.—I doubt this.

The kind of moral which we may in general expect from comedy I have already shown : it is morality in action, the art of life. In this respect the higher comedies of Molière contain many admirable observations happily expressed, which are still applicable ; others are tainted with the narrowness of his own private opinions, or the opinions which were prevalent in his age. In this sense Menander was also a philosophical comic writer ; and we may boldly place the moral maxims which remain of him by the side of those of Molière at the very least. But no comedy is constructed of mere sentences. The poet must be a moralist, but his personages cannot always be moralizing. And here Molière appears to me to have exceeded the bounds of propriety : he gives us in lengthened disquisitions the *pro* and *con* of the character exhibited by him ; nay, he allows this to consist, in part, in principles for which the persons themselves combat against the attacks of others. This leaves us nothing to conjecture ; and the highest refinement and delicacy of the comic of observation consists in this, that the characters disclose themselves unconsciously by traits which involuntarily escape from them. To this kind of comic the manner in which Oronte introduces his sonnet, Orgon listens to the accounts respecting Tartuffe and his wife, and Vadius and Trissotin fall by the ears, undoubtedly belongs ; but the endless

disquisitions of Alceste and Philinte respecting the way in which we ought to view the falsity and corruption of the world do not in the slightest respect belong to it. They are serious, but still they cannot satisfy us as exhausting the subject; and as they are dialogues in which the characters are precisely at the same point at the end as when they began, they are defective in the necessary dramatic movement. Such argumentative disquisitions which lead to nothing are frequent in all the most admired pieces of Molière; and nowhere more than in the *Misanthrope*. Hence the action, which is also poorly invented, is found to drag so very much; for, with the exception of a few scenes of a more sprightly description, it consists altogether of discourses formally introduced and supported, of which the stagnation can only be concealed by the art employed on the details of versification and expression. In a word, these pieces are too didactic, too expressly instructive; whereas the spectator should only be instructed incidentally, and, as it were, without its appearing to have been intended.

Before we proceed to consider more particularly the productions which properly belong to the poet himself, and are acknowledged as master-pieces, we shall offer a few observations on his imitations of the Latin comic writers.

The most celebrated is the *Avare*.—The manuscripts of the *Aulularia* of Plautus are unfortunately mutilated towards the end; but yet we find enough in them to excite our admiration. Molière has merely borrowed a few scenes and jokes from this



play ; for his plot is altogether different. In Plautus it is extremely simple : his Miser has found a treasure, which he anxiously watches and conceals. The suit of a rich bachelor for his daughter excites a suspicion in him that his wealth is known. The preparations for the wedding bring strange servants and cooks into his house ; he considers his gold pot no longer secure, and conceals it out of doors, which gives an opportunity to a slave of her lover, sent out with the knowledge of the daughter, to steal it. Without doubt the thief must afterwards have been obliged to make restitution, otherwise the piece would end in too melancholy a manner with the lamentations and imprecations of the old man. The knot of the love intrigue is easily untied : the young man, who had too soon assumed the rights of the marriage state, is the nephew of the bridegroom, who willingly renounces in his favour. All the events serve merely to lead the miser, by a series of agitations and alarms gradually heightened, to the situation in which his miserable passion is unfolded. Molière again, without attaining this object, puts a complicated machine in motion. Here we have a lover of the daughter, who, disguised as a servant, flatters the avarice of the old man ; a prodigal son who courts the bride of his father ; intriguing servants ; an usurer ; and after all a discovery at the end. The love intrigue is spun out in a very clumsy and every day manner ; and it has the effect of making us at different times lose sight altogether of Harpagon. Several scenes of a good comic description are merely subordinate, and do not neces-

sarily arise out of the thing itself in the true manner of an artist. Molière has accumulated as it were all kinds of avarice in one person; and yet the miser who buries his treasures and he who lends on pledge can hardly be the same. Harpagon starves his coach-horses: but why has he any? This applies only to a man who, with a disproportionately small income, wishes to keep up the appearance of a certain rank. Comic characterisation would soon be at an end were there really only one character of the miser. The most important deviation of Molière from Plautus is, that the one merely paints a person who watches over his treasure, and the other makes his miser in love. The love of an old man is in itself an object of ridicule; the anxiety of a miser is no less so. We may easily see that when we unite with avarice, which separates a man from others and withdraws him within himself, the sympathetic and liberal passion of love, the union must give rise to the most harsh contrasts. Avarice however is usually a very good preservative against falling in love. Where then is the more refined characterisation; and as such a wonderful noise is made about it, where shall we find the most valuable moral instruction? Whether in Plautus or in Molière? A miser and a superannuated lover may both be present at the representation of Harpagon, and both return from the theatre satisfied with themselves, while the miser says to himself, "I am at least not in love;" and the lover, "Well, at all events I am not a miser." High comedy represents those follies, however striking they may be, which

are reconcileable with the ordinary course of things ; whatever forms a singular exception, and can only be conceivable in an utter perversion of ideas, belongs to the arbitrary exaggeration of farce. Hence since the time of Molière (and the same thing was undoubtedly the case long before him), the enamoured and avaricious old man has been the peculiar common-place of the Italian masked comedy and *opera buffa*, to which in truth it certainly belongs. Molière has treated the main incident, the theft of the chest of gold, with an uncommon degree of unskilfulness. At the very beginning Harpagon, in a scene borrowed from Plautus, is suspicious lest a servant may not have discovered his treasure. After this he forgets it ; for four whole acts there is not a word about it, and the spectator drops as it were from the clouds when the servant all at once brings in the stolen coffer ; for we have no information as to the manner in which he fell upon the treasure which was so carefully concealed. Here Plautus has shown a great deal of ingenuity : the excessive anxiety of the old man for his pot of gold, and all that he does to save it, are the very cause of its loss. The subterraneous treasure is always invisibly present ; it is as it were the evil spirit which drives its keeper to madness. In all this we have a moral which is calculated to produce a very different impression. In the monologue of Harpagon after the theft, the modern poet has introduced the most incredible exaggerations. The calling out to the pit to discover the theft, which when well acted produces so great an effect, is a

trait of the old comedy of Aristophanes, and may serve to give us some idea of its powers of entertainment.

The *Amphitryon* is hardly any thing more than a free imitation of the Latin original. The whole plan and order of the scenes is retained. The waiting woman, or wife of Sosia, is the invention of Molière. The parody of the marriage history of the master in that of the servant is ingenious, and gives rise to the most amusing investigations on the part of Sosia to find out whether, during his absence, such a domestic blessing as that of *Amphitryon* may not have also been conferred on him. The revolting coarseness of the old mythological story is refined as much as can possibly be done without injury to its spirit and boldness, and the execution is in general extremely elegant. The uncertainty of the persons respecting their own identity and duplication is founded on a sort of comic metaphysics: the considerations of Sosia respecting his two I, which have cudgelled each other, may in reality furnish materials for thinking to our philosophers of the present day.

The most unsuccessful of Molière's imitations of the ancients is that of the *Phormio* in the *Fourberies de Scapin*. The whole plot is borrowed from Terence, and, with the addition of another discovery to that which he found, well or ill adapted, or rather tortured, to a consistency with modern manners. The poet has indeed gone very hurriedly to work with this plot, which he has patched together in a most negligent manner. The tricks of Scapin, for



the sake of which he has spoiled the plot, occupy the first place: but we may well ask whether they deserve it. The Grecian Phormio, a man who, for the sake of feasting with young companions, lends himself to all sorts of hazardous tricks, is an interesting and modest knave; Scapin directly the reverse. He had no cause to boast so much of his tricks; they are so stupidly planned, that in justice they ought not to have succeeded. Even supposing the two old men to be obtuse and brainless in the extreme, we can hardly conceive how they could so easily fall into such an obvious and clumsy snare. It is also disgustingly improbable that Zerbinette, who as a gipsey ought to have known how to conceal knavish tricks, should run out into the street and tell the first unknown person whom she meets, who happens to be Geronte himself, the deceit practised upon him by Scapin. The farce of the sack into which Scapin makes Geronte to crawl, then bears him off, and cudgels him as if by the hand of strangers, is altogether a most unsuitable excrescence. Boileau was therefore well warranted in reproaching Molière with having shamelessly allied Terence to Taburin, (the merry-andrew of a mountebank). In reality, Molière has here for once borrowed, not from the Italian masks, which was frequently the case with him, but from the Pagliasses of the ropedancers and vaulters. We must not forget that the *Cheats of Scapin* is one of the latest works of the poet. This and several others of the same period, as *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, and even his last, the *Malade Imagi-*

*naire*, sufficiently prove that the maturity of his mind as an artist did not increase with the progress of years, otherwise he would have been disgusted with such loose productions, and that frequently he brought forth pieces with great levity and haste when he had full leisure to think of posterity. If he occasionally subjected himself to stricter rules, we owe it more to his ambition and his desire to be numbered among the classical writers of the golden age than to any internal and growing aspiration after the highest excellence.

The high claims of the French critics for their favourite, which we have already mentioned, are principally founded on the *Ecole des Femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, and *Les Femmes Savantes*; pieces which are finished with great diligence. We must expressly state in the outset, that we leave the separate beauties of language and versification altogether to the decision of native critics. These merits can only be subordinate requisites; and the undue stress which is laid in France on the manner in which a piece is written and versified has, in our opinion, been both in tragedy and comedy injurious to the developement of other more essential requisites of the dramatic art. We shall confine our observations entirely to the general spirit and plan of these comedies.

The earliest of these, *L'Ecole des Femmes*, seems to me also the most excellent; it is the one in which there is the greatest display of vivacious humour, rapidity, and comic strength. A man arrived at an age unsuitable for wedlock, who purposely educates

a young girl in ignorance and simplicity, that he may preserve her faithful to him, while every thing turns out the reverse of his expectations, was not a new invention: a short while before Molière it had been related by Scarron, who derived it from a Spanish novel. Still however it was a lucky thought to labour this subject for the stage, and the execution is most masterly. Here we have a real and very interesting plot; no creeping investigations; all the matter is of one piece, without foreign levers and accidental intermixtures, with the exception of the catastrophe, which is brought about, by means of a discovery, in a manner somewhat arbitrarily. The *naïve* confessions and innocent devices of Agnes are full of sweetness; they form, with the unguarded confidence reposed by the young lover in his unknown rival, and the stifled rage of the old man against both, a series of comic scenes of the most amusing, and at the same time of the most refined description.

As an example how little the violation of certain probabilities diminish our pleasure, we may remark that Molière, with respect to the choice of scene, has here indulged in very great liberties. We will not inquire how Arnolph frequently happens to converse with Agnes in the street or in an open place, while he keeps her at the same time so carefully locked up. But when Horace does not know Arnolph as the intended husband of his mistress, and betrays every thing to him, this can only be admissible from Arnolph's passing with her by another name. Horace ought therefore to inquire for Arnolph in his own

house in a remote quarter, and not before the door of his mistress where he always finds him, without entertaining any suspicion from that circumstance. Why do the French critics set such a high value on similar probabilities in the dramatic art, when they must be compelled to admit that their best masters have not always observed them?

*Tartuffe* is an exact picture of pious hypocrisy held up for a warning to every man; it is an excellent serious satire, but with the exception of separate scenes it is not a comedy. It is generally admitted that the catastrophe is bad, as it is brought about by a foreign lever. It is bad, too, because the danger which Orgon runs of being driven from his house and cast into prison is by no means such an embarrassment as his blind confidence actually merited. Here the serious purpose of the work is openly disclosed, and the praise of the king is a dedication by which [the poet, even in the piece itself, humbly recommends himself to the protection of his majesty from the persecutions which he dreaded.

In the *Femmes Savantes* raillery has also the upper hand of mirth; the action is insignificant and not in the least attractive; and the catastrophe, after the manner of Molière, is introduced in a foreign and arbitrary manner. Yet these technical imperfections we might well excuse for the sake of satirical merit. But in this respect the composition, from the limited nature of its views, is extremely partial. We are not to expect from the comic poet that he should always, along with the exhibition of a folly, give us a representation of the opposite



reasonable way of thinking; in this way he would announce his object of instructing us in too methodical a manner. Two opposite follies may be exhibited together in an equally ludicrous manner. Molière has here ridiculed the affectation of a false taste, and the vain-gloriousness of empty knowledge. Proud in their own ignorance and contempt for all higher cultivation, they certainly deserve the ridicule bestowed on them; but that which in this comedy is portrayed as the correct way of thinking falls very nearly into the same error. All the reasonable persons of the piece, the father and his brother, the lover and the daughter, nay, even the ungrammatical maid, are all proud of what they neither are, nor have, nor know, nor seek to be, to have, or to know. The limited view which Chrysale takes of the female destination, the opinion of Clitander on the inutility of learning, and in other places the sentiments respecting the measure of cultivation and knowledge which is suitable to a man of rank, were all intended to convey to us the opinions of Molière himself on these subjects. We may here trace a vein of a certain valet-de-chambre morality, which also makes its appearance in him on many other points. We can easily conceive how his education and situation should lead him to entertain such ideas; but they are hardly such as entitle him to read lectures on human society. That Trissotin at the end should be ignominiously made to commit an act of low selfishness is odious; for we know that a learned man then alive was satirized under this character, and that his name was very slightly disguised. The

vanity of an author is rather a preservative against this weakness: there are much more lucrative careers than that of authorship for selfishness without a feeling of honour.

The *Misanthrope*, which, as is well known, was at first coldly received, is still less amusing than the two preceding pieces: the action is less rapid, or rather there is none at all; and the meagre incidents which give only an apparent life to the dramatic movement; the quarrel with Oronte respecting the sonnet, and its adjustment; the decision of the lawsuit which is always brought forward; the unmasking of Celimene through the vanity of the two Marquisses, and the jealousy of Arsinoë; these incidents have no connexion with one another. Besides all this, the general plot is not even probable. It is framed with a view to exhibit the thorough delineation of a character; but a character discloses itself much more in its relations with others than immediately. How comes Alceste to have chosen Philinte for a friend, a man whose principles were directly the reverse of his own? How comes he also to be enamoured of a coquette, who has nothing amiable in her character, and who entertains us merely by her scandal? We might well say, without exaggeration, that there is not one good point in the whole composition of this Celimene. In a character like that of Alceste, love is not a fleeting sensual impulse, but a serious feeling arising out of a want of a sincere mental union. His dislike of flattering falsehood and malicious scandal, which always characterize the conversation of Celimene,

breaks forth so incessantly, that the first moment he ever heard her open her lips ought to have banished him from her for ever. Finally, the subject is ambiguous, and that is its greatest fault. The limits within which Alceste is in the right and beyond which he is in the wrong, it would be no easy matter to fix, and I am afraid the poet did not here see very clearly himself. He everywhere however paints Philinte, with his illusory justifications of the way of the world, and his phlegmatic resignation, as the intelligent and amiable man. Alceste is most decidedly in the right in the case of the elegant Celimene, and only in the wrong in the inconceivable weakness of his conduct towards her: he is in the right in his complaints of the corruption of the social constitution; the facts at least which he adduces are disputed by nobody. He is in the wrong in delivering his sentiments with so much violence, and at an unseasonable time; but as he cannot prevail on himself to assume the dissimulation which is necessary to be well received in the world, he is perfectly in the right in preferring solitude to society. Rousseau has already censured the ambiguity of the piece, by which what is deserving of approbation seems to be turned into ridicule. His opinion was not altogether unprejudiced; for his own character, and his behaviour towards the world, had a striking similarity to that of Alceste; besides, he mistakes the essence of dramatic composition, and founds his condemnation on examples of an accidentally false direction.

So far with respect to the famed moral philoso-

phy of Molière in his pretended master-piece. From what has been stated, I consider myself warranted to pronounce, in opposition to the prevailing opinion, that Molière succeeded best with the coarse and homely comic, and that both his talent and his inclination would have altogether determined him to the composition of farces such as he continued to write even to the very end of his life. He seems always to have whipped himself up as it were to his more serious pieces in verse: we discover something of constraint in both plot and execution. His friend Boileau probably communicated to him his view of a correct mirth, of a grave and decorous laughter; and so Molière determined, after the carnival of his farces, to accommodate himself occasionally to the spare diet of the regular taste, and to unite what in their own nature are irreconcilable, namely, dignity and drollery. However, we find even in his prosaical pieces traces of that didactical and satirical vein which is peculiarly foreign to comedy; for example, in his constant attacks on physicians and lawyers, in his disquisitions respecting the true tone of society, &c. the intention of which is actually to censure, to refute, to instruct, and not merely to afford entertainment.

The classical reputation of Molière preserves his pieces on the stage,\* although in tone and manners

\* If they were not in possession of the stage, the indecency of a number of the scenes would cause many of them to be rejected, as the public of the present day, though probably not less corrupted than that of those times, is passionately fond of throwing over every thing a cloak of morality. When a piece of Molière



they are altogether obsolete. This is a danger to which the comic poet is inevitably exposed from the side on which his composition does not rest on a poetical foundation, but is determined by the prose of external reality. The originals of the individual portraits of Molière have long since disappeared. The comic poet who lays claim to immortality must, in the delineation of character and the disposition of his plan, rest principally on those motives which are always intelligible, as they are not taken from the manners of any particular age, but from human nature itself.

In addition to Molière we have to notice but a few older or contemporary comedies.—Of Corneille, who acquired a name from the imitation of Spanish comedies before he was known as a tragic author, only one piece keeps possession of the stage, *Le Menteur*, from Lope de Vega; and even this betrays, in our opinion, no comic talent. The poet, accustomed to stilts, moves awkwardly in a species of the drama, the first requisites of which are sweetness and ease. *Scarron*, who only understood burlesque, has displayed this talent or knack in several comedies taken from the Spanish, of which two, *Jodelle*, or

is acted, the head theatre of Paris is generally a downright solitude, if no particular circumstance brings the spectators together. Since these Lectures were held, *George Dandin* has been hissed at Paris, to the great grief of the critical watchmen of Sion. This was probably not on account of mere indecency. Whatever may be said in defence of the morality of the piece, the prerogatives of the higher classes are favoured in a very revolting manner in it; and it concludes with the shameless triumph of arrogance and depravity over plain honesty.

the *Servant turned Master*, and *Don Japhet of Armenia*, have till within these few years been occasionally acted as carnival farces, and have always been very successful. The plot of *Jodelle*, which belongs to Don Francisco de Roxas, is excellent; the style and the additions of Scarron have not been altogether able to disfigure it. All that is coarse, nauseous, and repugnant to taste, belongs to the French writer of the age of Lewis XIV., who in his day was not without celebrity; for the Spanish work is throughout characterised by a spirit of tenderness. The burlesque tone, which in many languages may be tolerated, has been properly rejected by the French, for whenever it is not guided by judgment and taste, it sinks to disgusting vulgarity. *Don Japhet* represents in a still ruder manner the mystification of a coarse fool. The original belongs to the kind which the Spaniards call *comedias de figuron*: it has undoubtedly been also spoiled by Scarron. The worst of the matter is, that his exaggerations are trifling without being amusing.

Racine fell upon a very different plan of imitation from that which was then followed, in his *Plaideurs*; the idea of which he derived from Aristophanes. The piece in this respect stands alone. The action is merely a light piece of legerdemain; but the follies which he portrays belong to a circle, and, with the imitations of the officers of court and advocates, form a complete whole. Many lines are at once witty sallies and characteristical traits; and some of the jokes have that apparently aimless drollery, which genuine comic inspiration can alone

inspire. Racine would have become a dangerous rival of Molière, if he had continued to exercise the talent which he has here displayed.

Some of the comedies of a younger contemporary, and opponent of Molière, *Boursault*, have still kept possession of the stage; they are all of the secondary description, which the French call *pieces a tiroir*, and of which Molière gave the first example in his *Facheux*. This kind, from the accidental nature of the scenes, which are strung together on one common occasion, bear in so far a resemblance to the *mimi* of the ancients; they ought also to have it in the accurate imitation of individual peculiarities. These subjects are particularly favourable for the display of the mimic art in the more limited signification of the word, as the same player always appears in a different disguise, and assumes a new character. It is advisable not to extend such pieces, beyond one act, as the want of dramatic movement, and the uniformity of the cause throughout all the different changes, are very apt to excite impatience. Boursault's pieces, which are not without their merit, are tediously spun out to five acts. The idea of exhibiting *Æsop*, a sage born a slave and deformed in person, as in possession of court favour, was original and happy. But in the two pieces, *Æsop in the City*, and *Æsop at Court*, the fables which are tacked to every important scene are drowned in diffuse morals; they are altogether distinct from the dialogue, instead of being interwoven with it like the fable of Menenius Agrippa in Shakspeare; and modern manners do not suit

with this childish mode of instruction. In the *Mercure Galant* all sorts of out of the way beings bring their petitions to the writer of a weekly paper. This thought and many of the most entertaining details have, if I am not mistaken, been borrowed by a favourite German author without acknowledgment.

A considerable time elapsed after the death of Molière before the appearance of *Regnard*, to whom the second place in comedy is usually assigned. He was a sort of adventurer who, after roaming a long time up and down the world, fell to the trade of a dramatic writer, and divided himself betwixt the Italian theatre which still continued to flourish under Gherardi, and for which he sketched the French scenes, and the composition of regular comedies in verse. The *Joueur*, his first play, is justly preferred to the others. The author was acquainted with this passion, and the way of living of gamesters, from his own experience: it is a picture after nature, with strongly drawn features, executed without exaggeration; and the plot and accessory circumstances are all appropriate and in character, with the exception of a pair of caricatures which might have been dispensed with. The *Distrain* possesses not only the faults of the methodical pieces of character which I have already censured, but it is no peculiar character; the mistakes occasioned by the unfortunate habit of being absent in thought are all alike, and admit of no heightening: they might therefore have filled up an after-piece, but certainly did not merit the distinction



of being spun out into a comedy of five acts. Regnard has done little more than dramatise a series of anecdotes which La Bruyere had assembled together under the name of a certain character. The execution of the *Legataire Universel* shows more comic talent; but from the error of the general plan, arising out of a want of moral feeling, this talent is completely thrown away. Laharpe declares this piece the *chef-d'œuvre* of comic pleasantry. It is, in fact, such a subject for pleasantry as would move a stone to pity; as enlivening as the grin of a death's head. What a subject for mirth? A feeble old man in the jaws of death, who is teased by young profligates for his property, and who has a false will imposed on him while he is lying insensible, as is believed, on his death bed. If it is true that these scenes have always given rise to much laughter on the French stage, it only proves the spectators to possess the same unfeeling levity which disgust us in the author. We have elsewhere shown that, with an apparent indifference, a moral respect is essential to the comic poet, as the impressions which he wishes to produce are inevitably destroyed whenever disgust or compassion is excited.

*Legrand* the actor, a contemporary of Regnard, was one of the first comic poets who acquired celebrity in afterpieces in verse, a species in which the French have since produced a number of elegant trifles. He has not however risen to any thing like the same posthumous fame as Regnard; Laharpe dismisses him with very little ceremony. Yet we

should be disposed to rank him very high as an artist had he composed nothing else than the King of Lubberlyland (*Le Roi de Cocagne*), a sprightly farce in the wonderful style, overflowing with what is very rare in France, a native fanciful wit, animated by the most lively mirth, which, although carried the length of the most frolicsome giddiness, sports on and about all subjects with the utmost harmlessness. We might call it an elegant and ingenious piece of madness; an example of the manner in which the drama of Aristophanes, or rather that of Eupolis,\* who had also dramatised the tale of Lubberlyland, might be brought on our stage without exciting disgust, and without personal satire. And yet Legrand was certainly unacquainted with the old comedy, and his own genius (we make no scruple of using this expression) led him to the invention. The execution is as careful as in a regular comedy; but to this title in the French opinion it can have no pretensions from the wonderful world which is represented to us, from several of the decorations, and from the music here and there introduced. The French critics show themselves in general indifferent or unjust towards every suggestion of genuine fancy. Before they can entertain respect for a work it must bear a certain appearance of labour and effort. Among a giddy and light minded people they have appropriated to themselves the post of honour of pedantry: they confound the levity of jocularly, which is quite compatible with profundity in art,

\* See vol. i. p. 224.

with the levity arising from shallowness, which, as a natural gift or natural defect, is so frequent among their countrymen.

The eighteenth century has produced a number of comic writers in France of the second and third rank, but no distinguished genius capable of advancing the art a step farther, by which means the belief in the unapproachable excellence of Molière has become still more firmly riveted. As we have not room at present to go through all the separate productions, we shall premise a few observations respecting the general spirit of French comedy before entering on the consideration of the writers whom we have not yet mentioned.

The want of easy progress, and lengthened disquisitions in stationary dialogue, have characterized more or less every writer since the time of Molière, on whose regular pieces the conventional rules applicable to tragedy have had an indisputable influence. French comedy in verse has its tirades as well as tragedy; and this circumstance contributed to the introduction of a certain degree of stiff etiquette. The comedy of other nations has generally descended, from motives which we can be at no loss in understanding, into the circle of the inferior classes; but the French comedy is usually confined to the upper classes of society. Here also we trace the influence of the court as the central point of the whole national vanity. Those spectators, who in reality had no access to the great world, were flattered by being surrounded on the stage with Marquises and Chevaliers, and while the poet satirised the fashion-

able follies, he endeavoured to snatch something of that privileged tone which was so much the object of envy. Society rubs off the salient angles of character; its peculiar entertainment consists in the detection of the ridiculous, and hence we acquire the faculty of being upon our guard against the observations of others. The natural, cordial, and jovial comic of the inferior classes is laid aside, and another description, the fruit of polished society, and bearing the stamp of the insipidity of such an aimless way of living, comes to be substituted in its stead. The object of these comedies is no longer life but society, that perpetual negotiation between conflicting vanities which never ends in a sincere treaty of peace: the embroidered dress, the hat under the arm, and the sword by the side, essentially belong to them, and the whole of the characterisation is limited to the folly of the men and the coquetry of the women. The insipid uniformity of these pictures was unfortunately too often seasoned by the corruption of moral principles which, more especially after the age of Louis XIV. till beyond the middle of the century, under the regency and the government of Louis XV., it became the fashion openly to avow. In this period the favourite of the women, the *homme à bonnes fortunes*, who in the tone of satiety boasts of the multitude of conquests too easily accomplished by him, was not a character invented by the comic writers, but a portrait accurately taken from real life, as is proved by many memoirs of the foregoing century, even down to those of a Besenval. We are disgusted



with the unveiled sensuality of the love intrigues of the Grecian comedy ; but the Greeks would have found the love intrigues with married women in the French comedy, entered into merely from giddy vanity, much more disgusting. Limits have been fixed by nature herself to sensual excess ; but when vanity assumes the part of a sensuality already deadened and enervated, it gives birth to the most hollow corruption. If in the constant ridicule of marriage by the *petit-maitres*, and in their moral scepticism especially with regard to women, it was the intention of the poets to censure a prevailing depravity, the picture is not on that account the less dangerous. The great or fashionable world, which in point of numbers is the small, but which considers itself as alone of any importance, can hardly be improved by it ; and the example is but too seductive for the other classes from the brilliancy with which the characters are surrounded. But in so far as comedy is concerned this deadening corruption is by no means entertaining ; and in many pieces, in which fools of quality give the tone, for example in the *Chevalier à la mode* of *Dancourt*, the picture of complete moral dissoluteness which, although true, is both unpoetical and unnatural, is not merely productive of *ennui* but of the most decided repugnance and disgust.

From the number of writers to whom this charge chiefly applies, *Destouches* and *Marivaux*, fruitful or at least diligent comic poets, the former in verse, and the latter in prose, deserve to be excepted. They acquired considerable distinction among their contem-

poraries in the first half of the eighteenth century, but few of their works survived either of them on the stage. Destouches was a moderate, tame, and well-meaning author, who applied himself with all his powers to the composition of regular comedies, which were always drawn out to the length of five acts, and in which, with the exception of the vivacity displayed by Lisette and her lover, Frontin, or Pasquin, in virtue of their situation, there is nothing of a laughable description. He was not in any danger, from an excess of frolicsome petulance, of falling from the dignified tone of the supposed high comic into the familiarity of farce, which the French hold in such contempt. With moderate talents, without humour, and almost without vivacity, neither ingenious in invention, nor possessed of a deep insight into the human mind and human affairs, he has in some of his productions, *Le Glorieux*, *Le Philosophi Marié*, and especially *L'Indecis*, with great credit to himself, given an example of what true and unpretending diligence is capable of effecting. Other pieces, for instance, *L'Ingrat* and *L'Homme Singulier*, are complete failures, in which we may see that a poet who considers Tartuffe and the Misanthrope as the highest objects of imitation, and this was evidently the case with Destouches, has only another step to take to lose sight of the comic art altogether. These two works of Molière have not been friendly lights to his followers, but real impediments in their way. Whenever a comic poet in his preface worships the Misanthrope as a model, I can immediately tell the result of his labours. For the dull and conditional seri-

ousness of prosaic life, and for prosaical applications stamped with the respectful name of moral, he will have sacrificed every thing like frolicsome inspiration, and all true poetical entertainment.

That Marivaux is a mannerist is so universally acknowledged in France, that the peculiar term of *marivaudage* has been invented for his manner. But this manner is at least his own, and at first sight by no means unpleasing. Delicacy of mind cannot be denied to Marivaux, only it is coupled with a certain littleness. We have stated it to be the most refined kind of the comic of observation, when a peculiarity or property appears most conspicuous at the very time its possessor has the least suspicion of it, or is most studious to conceal it. Marivaux has applied this to the passions; and *naïveté* in the involuntary disclosure of emotions certainly belongs to the comic sphere. But then this *naïveté* is prepared by him in too artful a manner, appears too solicitous for our favour, and we may almost say seems too well pleased with itself. It is the game of hide and seek of children, who cannot keep quiet in their corner, but will always be popping out their heads, when they are not immediately discovered; nay sometimes, which is still worse, it is like the squinting through a fan held up from affected modesty. In Marivaux we always see his aim from the very beginning, and the whole of our attention is directed to the way by which he is to lead us to it. This would be a skilful mode of composing, if it did not degenerate into the unimportant and the superficial. Petty inclinations are strengthened by petty motives, exposed to petty probations,

and brought by petty steps nearer and nearer to the conclusion. The whole generally turns on a declaration of love, and all sorts of clandestine means are tried to elicit it, or every kind of slight allusion is hazarded to hasten it. Marivaux has neither painted characters, nor contrived intrigues. The whole plot is generally an unpronounced word, which is always at the tongue's end, and which is frequently kept back in a pretty arbitrary manner. He is so uniform in his motives, that when we have read one of his pieces with a tolerable degree of attention we know all of them. Still however we must rank him above the herd of stiff imitators; something is even to be learned from him, as he possessed a peculiar though a very limited manner of viewing the essence of comedy.

Two other separate works are named as master-pieces in regular comedy in verse, belonging to two writers who here perhaps have taken more pains, but who have given a freer scope to their natural talent in other departments: the *Metromanie* of Piron and the *Mechant* of Gresset. The *Metromanie* is not without humorous inspiration. In the young man possessed with a rage for poetry, Piron was desirous in some measure of painting himself: but as we always go tenderly to work in the ridicule of ourselves, along with the amiable weakness in question, he exhibits in his hero talents, magnanimity, and goodheartedness. But this tender regard is not peculiarly favourable for comic strength. The *Mechant* is one of those gloomy comedies which might be rapturously hailed by a Timon as



serving to confirm him in his aversion to human society, but which on social and cheerful minds can only be productive of the most painful effects. Why paint a dark and odious disposition, which, destitute of all human feelings, feeds its vanity in a cold contempt and derision of every thing, and which is solely occupied in aimless detraction? Why exhibit such a moral deformity, which could hardly be tolerated even in tragedy, for the mere purpose of producing domestic discontent and petty embarrassments?

Yet, according to the decision of the French critics, these three comedies, the *Glorieux*, the *Metromanie*, and the *Mechant*, are all that the eighteenth century can oppose to Molière. We should be disposed to rank the *Old Bachelor* of the late *Collin d'Harleville* much higher; but for this true picture of manners there is no scale in the works of Molière, and it can only be compared with those of Terence. We have here the most happy union of the utmost refinement and accuracy in character, with the interest which we derive from an ably contrived plot; and a certain mildness of sentiment is diffused over the whole.

After a few observations on the secondary species of the *opera*, the *operette* and the *vaudeville*, we shall conclude with a view of the present condition of the French stage with reference to the histrionic art.

In the serious, heroic, or rather the ideal *opera*, if we may so express ourselves, we can only mention one poet of the age of Louis XIV.

*Quinault*, who is now little read, but who is deserving of high praise. Boileau at an early period satirised him as a tragic poet; but he was afterwards highly successful in another species, that of the musical drama. Mazarin had introduced into France the taste for the Italian opera; Louis was also desirous of rivalling or surpassing foreign countries in the external magnificence of the drama, in decoration, machinery, music, and dancing; they were to be employed in the celebration of the court festivals; and hence Molière was employed to write gay operas, and *Quinault* serious operas, for the music of Lulli. I am not sufficiently travelled in the earlier literature of the Italian opera to be able to speak with accuracy, but I suspect that here also *Quinault* laboured more after Spanish than Italian models; and more particularly, that he derived from the festal dramas of Calderon the general form of his operas, and the allegorical allusions which are often to be found in them. It is true, poetical ornament is much more sparingly dealt out, as the whole is necessarily shortened for the sake of the music, and the very nature of the French language and versification is incompatible with the splendid magnificence, the luxurious fulness, displayed by Calderon. But the operas of *Quinault* are, in their easy progress, truly fanciful; and the serious operas, in my opinion, cannot be stripped of the charm of the wonderful without becoming at length wearisome. In so far as the definition of his department is concerned, *Quinault* appears to me to have taken a much better road than that

which Metastasio travelled long after him. The latter has admirably provided for the wants of a melodious music solely expressive of feeling; but where does he furnish the least food for the imagination? I am not so sure whether Quinault is justly entitled to praise for sacrificing, in compliance with the taste of his countrymen, every thing like comic intermixture. He has been censured for a play on language in the expression of feeling. But is it just to exact the severity of the tragical cothurnus in light works of this description? Why should not Poetry be also allowed her arabesque? No person can be more an enemy to mannerism than I am; but we ought first to understand the degree of nature and truth which we have a right to expect from each species, and which is alone compatible with it. The verses of Quinault have no other *naïveté* and simplicity than those of the madrigal; and though they occasionally fall into the luscious, at other times they express a languishing tenderness with sweetness and the softest melody. The opera ought to resemble the enchanted gardens of Armida, of which Quinault says,

*Dans ces lieux enchantés la volupté preside.*

We ought only to be awaked out of the voluptuous dreams of feeling to enjoy the magical illusions of fancy. When we once, instead of real men, imagine beings whose only language is song, the gradation is very short to represent to ourselves creatures whose only employment is love; that feeling which hovers

between the sensible and intellectual world ; and the first invention is rendered natural by means of the second.

Quinault has had no successors. How far the French operas of the present day are below his both in point of invention and execution ! The heroic and tragic have been insisted on in a department where they cannot produce their proper effect. Instead of handling mythological materials or subjects taken from chivalrous or pastoral romances with fanciful freedom, they have chained themselves down to history in the manner of tragedy, and by means of their heavy seriousness, and the pedantry of their rules, they have so managed matters, that Dulness with leaden sceptre presides over the opera. The deficiencies of their music, the unfitness of the French language for composition in a style any thing higher than that of the most simple national melodies, the unaccented and arbitrary nature of their recitative, the bawling bravura of the singers, we leave to the animadversions of musical critics.

With pretensions a great deal lower the *comic opera* or *opérette* approaches much more nearly to perfection. With respect to the composition, it may and indeed ought to assume only a national tone. The transition from song to speech, without any musical accompaniment or heightening, which was censured by Rousseau as an unsuitable mixture of two modes of composition, may be displeasing to the ear ; but it has unquestionably produced an advantageous effect on the structure of the pieces. In



the recitatives which are generally not half understood, and seldom listened to with any degree of attention, a plot which is even moderately complicated cannot be developed with due clearness. Hence in the Italian *opera buffa*, the action is altogether neglected; and along with its grotesque caricatures, it is distinguished for uniformity of situation, for want of dramatic progress. But the comic opera of the French, although from the space occupied by the music it is unsusceptible of any solid dramatic developement, is still calculated to produce a considerable stage effect, and speaks in a pleasing manner to the imagination. The poets have not here been prevented by the constraint of rules from following out their theatrical views. Hence these fleeting productions are in no wise deficient in the rapidity, life, and amusement, which are frequently wanting in the more correct dramatic works of the French. The distinguished favour which the *operettes* of a Favart, a Sedaine and later poets, some of whom are still alive, always meet with in Germany, where foreign literature has long lost its commanding influence, and where the national taste is decisively declared against French tragedy, is by no means to be placed to the account of the music; it is in reality owing to their poetical merit. To cite only one example out of many, I do not hesitate to declare the whole series of scenes in *Raoul Sire de Crequy*, where the children of the drunken turnkey set the prisoner at liberty, a master-piece of theatrical painting. How much it were to be wished that the tragedy of the

French, and even their comedy in court-dress, had but a little of this truth of circumstance, life, and power of arresting the attention. In several *operettes*, for instance in a *Richard Cœur de Lion* and a *Nina*, the traces of the romantic are not to be mistaken.

The *vaudeville* is but a variation of the comic opera. The essential difference is that it dispenses with composition, by which the comic opera forms a musical whole, as the songs are set to well-known popular airs. The incessant skipping from the song to the dialogue, often after merely a few scrapes of the violin and a few words, with the accumulation of airs mostly common, but frequently also in a style altogether different from the poetry, drives an ear accustomed to Italian music to despair. If we can once get over this, we shall not unfrequently be richly recompensed in comic drollery; even in the choice of a melody, and the allusion to the common text, there is often a display of wit. In earlier times writers of higher pretensions, a *Le Sage* and a *Piron* have laboured in the department of the *vaudeville*, and even for *marionettes*. The wits who now dedicate themselves to this species are little known out of Paris, but this gives them no great concern. It not unfrequently happens that several of them join together, that the fruit of their common talents may be brought to light with the greater speed. The parody of new theatrical pieces, the anecdotes of the day, forming the common subject of talk among all the idlers of the capital, must furnish them with a subject in the enjoyment of which little delay can be brooked. These *vaudevilles* are like the gnats that buz about

in a summer evening ; they often sting, but they fly merrily about so long as the sun of opportunity shines upon them. A piece like the *Despair of Jocrisse*, which, after a lapse of years, may be still given out, passes justly among these ephemeral productions for a classical work that has gained the crown of immortality. We must, however, see it acted by Brunet, whose face is almost a mask, and who is nearly as inexhaustible in the part of the simpleton as Puncinello is in his.

From a consideration of the sportive secondary species, or the mixture of the comic and the affecting, in which authors and spectators give themselves up without reserve to their natural inclinations, it appears to me evident, that as the foundation of comic wit with the Italians consists of grotesque mimicry or buffoonery, and with the English of humour, with the French it consists of good natured gaiety. This property is every where visible, among the lower orders more especially, where it has not been supplanted by the artifice of corruption.

With respect to the present condition of the dramatic art in France, every thing depends on the endeavours to introduce the theatrical liberties of other countries, or species of a mixed description. The hope of producing any thing truly new in the two species which are alone admitted to be regular, of excelling the works already produced, of filling up the old frames in a richer manner, becomes more and more distant every day. A new work seldom obtains a decided approbation ; and, even at best, this approbation is only continued till it has been found out

that the work is only a new preparation of their old classical productions.

We have passed over several things relating to these endeavours, that we may at once deliver all the observations which we have to make on the subject. The attacks hitherto made against the French forms of art, first by *De la Motte*, and afterwards by *Diderot* and *Mercier*, have been like voices in the wilderness. It could not be otherwise, as the principles on which these writers proceeded were in reality destructive, not merely of the conventional forms, but of all poetical forms whatever, and as none of them showed themselves capable of supporting their doctrine in a suitable manner by their own example. Even when they were in the right they contrived nevertheless, by a false application, to be in the wrong.

The most remarkable among them is *Diderot*, whom Lessing calls the best critic of the French. I should be disposed to affirm, in opposition to this opinion, that he was no critic at all. I will not lay any stress on his mistaking the object of poetry and the fine arts, which he considered to be merely moral: a man may be a critic without being a theorist. But a man cannot be a critic without being thoroughly acquainted with the conditions, means, and styles of an art; and here the nature of the studies and acquisitions of *Diderot* renders him extremely suspicious. This ingenious sophist deals out his blows with such boisterous haste in the province of criticism, that the half of them are thrown away. The true and the false, the known and the new, the



essential and the unimportant, are so mixed up together, that the highest praise we can bestow upon him is, that he was worthy of the task of disentangling them. What he wished to accomplish had either been already accomplished, though not in France, or did not deserve to be accomplished, or was altogether impracticable. His attack of the dramatic probabilities, of the excessive symmetry of the French versification, declamation, and mode of acting, was just; but he objected at the same time to all theatrical elevation, and refused to allow to the characters any thing like a perfect mode of communication of what was passing within them. He no where assigns the reason why he held versification as not suitable, or prose as more suitable, to familiar tragedy; this has been extended by others, and by Lessing, unfortunately, among the rest, to every species of the drama; but the ground for it evidently rests on nothing but the mistaken principles of illusion and nature, to which we have more than once adverted.\* And when he gives an undue preference to the sentimental drama and the familiar tragedy, species valuable in themselves, and susceptible of being treated in a truly poetic manner; was not this on account of the application? The main thing, according to him, is not character and situations, but ranks of life and family relations, that spectators in similar ranks and relations may lay the example to heart. But this would put an end to

\* I have stated and refuted them in a treatise on *the Relation of the Fine Arts to Nature* in the fifth number of the periodical work *Prophetus*, published by *Leo von Seckendorf*.

every thing like true enjoyment in art. Diderot recommended that the composition should have this direction, with the very view which met with the displeasure of the Athenians when Phrynichus, who exhibited a historical tragedy founded on the events of their own times, was subjected on that account to punishment.\* The view of a fire by night, from the wonderful effect produced by the combination of flames and darkness, may fill the unconcerned beholder with delight; but when our neighbour's house is burning,—*jam proximus ardet Ucalegon*—we shall hardly be disposed to consider the affair in such a picturesque light.

We see clearly that Diderot was induced to take in his sail in the same proportion that he himself made dramatic attempts. He displayed the greatest boldness in an offensive publication of his youth, in which he wished to overturn the whole dramatic system of the French; he was less daring in the dialogues which accompany the *Fils Naturel*; and he showed the greatest moderation in the treatise appended to the *Pere de Famille*. He carries his hostility a great deal too far with respect to the forms and the objects of the dramatic art. But in other respects he has not gone far enough: in his view of the unities of place and time, and the mixture of seriousness and mirth, he has shown himself infected with the prejudices of his nation.

The two pieces above mentioned, which obtained an unmerited reputation on their first appearance,

\* See vol. i. p. 80.

have long since been properly appreciated. Lessing has already pronounced a severe sentence on the *Fils Naturel*, without, however, censuring the scandalous plagiarism from Goldoni. But he calls the *Pere de Famille* an excellent piece, forgetting however to assign any grounds for his opinion. Its defective plot and want of connexion have been well exposed by Laharpe. The execution in both pieces displays the utmost mannerism: the characters, who are every thing but natural, from their frigid prating about virtue in the most hypocritical style, and the tears which they are perpetually shedding, are altogether intolerable. We Germans may justly say, *Hinc illæ lacrimæ!* hence the unnecessary tears with which our stage has ever since been overflowed. The custom which has grown up of giving long and circumstantial directions respecting the action, and which we owe also to Diderot, has been of the greatest detriment to dramatic eloquence. In this way the poet gives, as it were, an order on the player, instead of paying out of his own purse.\* All good dramatists have uniformly had the action in some degree present to their minds; but if the actor requires instruction on the subject, he will hardly possess the talent of following it up in a suitable manner. The speeches should be so framed that an intelligent actor could hardly fail to give them the proper action.

\* I remember to have read the following direction in a German drama, which is not worse than many others:—"He flashes lightning at him with his eyes (*Er blitzt ihn mit den augen an*) and goes off."

It will be admitted, that long before Diderot there were serious family pictures, affecting dramas, and familiar tragedies, much better than any which he was capable of executing. Voltaire, who could never rightly succeed in comedy, gave in his *Enfant Prodigue* and *Nanine* a mixture of comic scenes and affecting situations, the latter of which are deserving of high praise. The affecting drama had been before exhibited in France by *La Chaussée*. All this was in verse: and why not? Of the familiar tragedy, with the very same moral direction for which Diderot contended, there had been several examples in England; and one of them, *Beverley, or the Gamester*, is translated into French. The period of sentimentality was of some use to the affecting or sentimental drama; but the familiar tragedy was never very successful in France, where they were too much attached to brilliancy and pomp. The *Melanie* of *Laharpe* (to whom the stage of the present day owes *Philoctete*, the most faithful imitation of a Grecian piece) abounds with those painful impressions which are the rock that this species may be said to split upon. The piece may be very well adapted to enlighten the conscience of a father who has determined to force his daughter to enter a cloister; but to other spectators it can only be painful.

Notwithstanding the opposition which Diderot experienced, he has however been the founder of a sort of school of which the most distinguished names are *Beaumarchais* and *Mercier*. The former wrote only two pieces in the spirit of his prede-



cessor, *Eugenie*, and the *Criminal Mother*; and they display the very same faults. His acquaintance with Spain and the Spanish theatre led him to bring something new on the stage in the way of the piece of intrigue, a species which had long been neglected. These works were more distinguished by witty sallies than by humour of character; but their greatest attraction consisted in the allusions to his own career as an author. The plot of the *Barber of Seville* is rather trite; the *Marriage of Figaro* is planned with much more art, but the manners which it portrays are loose; and it is also censurable in a poetical point of view, on account of the number of foreign excrescences with which it abounds. In both of them French characters are exhibited under the disguise of a Spanish costume which is very ill observed.\* The extraordinary applause which these pieces met with would lead to the conclusion, that the French public do not hold the comedy of *Intrigue* in such low estimation as is done by the critics: but the means by which Beaumarchais pleased were certainly, in part at least, foreign to art.

The attempt of Ducis to make his countrymen acquainted with Shakspeare by modelling a few of his tragedies according to the French rules, cannot be accounted an enlargement of their theatre. We perceive here and there indeed, the “torn members of the poet;” but the whole is so constrained, disfi-

\* The numerous sins of Beaumarchais against the Spanish manners and observances, are pointed out by *De la Huerta* in the introduction to his *Teatro Español*.

gured, and, from the simple fulness of the original, tortured and twisted into such miserable intricacy, that even when the language is retained word for word it ceases to convey its genuine meaning.—The concourse which these tragedies attract, especially from their affording an unusual room to the inimitable *Talma* for the display of his art, must be looked upon as no inconsiderable symptom of the dissatisfaction of the people with their old works, and the want of being more powerfully agitated.

As the Parisian theatres are at present tied down to certain kinds, and as their poetry has here a point of contact with the Government, the numerous mixed and new attempts are for the most part banished to the subordinate theatres. Of these new attempts the *Melo-dramas* constitute a great part. A statistical writer of the theatre informs us, that for a number of years back the new productions in tragedy and regular comedy have been fewest, and that the melo-dramas in number have exceeded all the others put together. They do not mean by melo-drama, as we do, a drama in which the pauses are filled up by monologue with instrumental music, but where actions in any wise wonderful, adventurous, or even sensual, are exhibited in emphatic prose with suitable decorations and dresses. Advantage might be taken of this inclination to furnish a better description of entertainment; for the most of the melo-dramas are unfortunately rude even to insipidity, and resemble abortive attempts at the romantic.

In the sphere of dramatic literature the labours of a *Le Mercier* are undoubtedly deserving of the critic's attention. This able man endeavours to break through the prescribed limits in every possible way, and is so passionately fond of his art that nothing can deter him from it ; although almost every new attempt which he makes converts the pit into a true field of battle.\*

\* Since these Lectures were held, such a tumult arose in the theatre at Paris on the representation of his *Christopher Columbus*, that several of the champions of Boileau came off with bruised and broken shins. They were in the right to fight like desperadoes ; for if this piece had succeeded it would have been all over with the consecrated unities and good taste in the separation of the heroic and the low. The first act takes place in the house of Columbus, the second at the court of Isabella, the third and last on shipboard near the new world. The object of the poet was to show, that the man in whom any grand idea originates is every where opposed and thwarted by the limited and commonplace views of other men ; but that the strength of his enthusiasm enables him to overcome all obstacles. In his own house and among his acquaintances Columbus is considered as insane ; at court he obtains with difficulty a lukewarm support ; in his own vessel a mutiny is on the point of breaking out when the wished for land is discovered, and the piece ends with the exclamation of " Land, land !" — All this is conceived and planned in a very skilful manner ; but in the execution there are still many deficiencies. In another piece not yet acted or printed, called *La Journée des Dupes*, which I heard the author read, he has painted with historical truth, both in regard to circumstances and the spirit of the age, a well known court cabal against Cardinal Richelieu, which was unsuccessful. It is a political comedy, in which the Rag-gatherer as well as the King express themselves in language suitable to their stations. The poet has, with the greatest ingenuity, shown the manner in which trivial causes

From all this we may infer, that the inclinations of the French public, when they forget the duties imbibed by them from Boileau's Art of Poetry, are not altogether so hostile to the dramatic liberties of other nations as might be supposed, and that the old and narrow system is chiefly upheld by a superstitious attachment to traditional opinions.

The *histrionic art*, particularly in high comedy and tragedy, has been long carried in France to a great degree of perfection. In external dignity, quickness, correctness of memory, and, in a wonderful degree, of propriety and elegance in the delivery of verse, the best French actors can hardly be surpassed. Their efforts to please are incredible: of every moment which they pass on the stage they endeavour to avail themselves as a valuable opportunity. The highly fastidious taste of a Paris pit, and the wholesome severity of the journalists, reduce them, it is true, to the necessity of incessant competition; and the circumstance of such a number of classical works, which for generations have been in the possession of the stage, contributes also greatly to their excellence in their art. As the spectators have these works nearly by heart, their whole attention may be directed to the acting, and every faulty syllable meets in this way with censure.

assist or impede the execution of a great political design, the dissimulation practised by the persons of the drama towards others, and even towards themselves, and the different tones which they assume according to circumstances; in a word, he has exhibited the whole inward aspect of the political game.



In high comedy the social refinement of the nation gives great advantages to their actors. But with respect to tragical composition, the art of the actor should also accommodate itself to the spirit of the poetry. I am inclined to doubt, however, whether this is the case with the French actors, and whether the authors of the tragedies, especially those of the age of Louis XIV. would altogether recognize themselves in the mode in which these compositions are at present represented.

The tragical imitation and recitation of the French oscillate between two opposite extremes, the first of which is occasioned by the prevailing tone of the piece, while the second seems rather to be at variance with it,—between measured formality and extravagant boisterousness. The first might formerly preponderate, but the balance is now on the other side.

Let us hear the description of Voltaire of the manner in which Augustus delivered his discourse to Cinna and Maximus in the time of Louis XIV. Augustus entered with the step of a braggadocio, his head covered with a four-cornered peruque which hung down to his girdle; the peruque was stuck full of laurel leaves, and above this he wore a large hat with a double row of red feathers. He seated himself on a huge easy chair with two steps, Cinna and Maximus on two small chairs; and the pompous declamation fully corresponded to the ostentatious manner in which he made his appearance. As at that time, and even long afterwards, tragedies were

acted in the newest fashioned court dress, with large cravats, swords, and hats, no other movements were practicable but such as were allowable in an anti-chamber, or, at most, a slight waving of the hand; and it was even considered a bold theatrical attempt, when, in the last scene of *Polyeucte*, Severus entered with his hat on his head for the purpose of accusing Felix of treachery, and the latter listened to him with his hat under his arm.

However, there were even early examples of an extravagance of an opposite description. In the *Mariamne* of Mairet, an older poet than Corneille, the player who acted Herod roared himself to death. This may indeed be called "out-heroding Herod!" When Voltaire was instructing an actress in some tragic part, she said to him, "Were I to play in this manner, Sir, they would say the devil was in me."—"Very right," answered Voltaire, "an actress ought to have the devil in her." This expression proves, at least, no very keen sense for that dignity and sweetness which in an ideal composition, such as the French tragedy pretends to be, ought never to be lost sight of, even in the wildest whirlwind of passion.

I found occasionally, even in the action of the very best players of the present day, sudden leaps from the measured solemnity in recitation and gesticulation which the general tone of the composition required, to a boisterousness of passion absolutely convulsive, without any due preparation or softening by intervening gradations. They are led to this by a sort of obscure feeling, that the conventional

forms of poetry generally impede the movements of nature; when the poet any where leaves them at liberty they then indemnify themselves for the former constraint, and load, as it were, this rare moment of abandonment with the whole amount of life and animation which had been kept back, and which ought to have been equally diffused over the whole. Hence their convulsive and obstreperous violence. In bravura they take care not to be deficient; but they frequently lose sight of the true spirit of the composition. In general, they consider their parts as a sort of mosaic work of brilliant passages (with the single exception of the powerful Talma), and they rather endeavour to make the most of each separate passage, independently of the rest, than to go back to the invisible central point of the character, and to consider the whole of the expressions as so many emanations from that point. They are always afraid of underdoing their parts; and hence they are worst qualified for reserved action, for eloquent silence, where, under an appearance of outward tranquillity, the most hidden emotions of the mind are betrayed. However, this is a part which is seldom imposed on them by their poets; and if the cause of the above excessive violence in the expression of passion is not to be found in their works, they at all events occasion the actor to lay greater stress on superficial brilliancy than on a profound knowledge of character.\*

\* See a treatise of *M. Von Humboldt* the elder, in *Goethe's Propyläen* on the French acting, equally distinguished for a refined and solid spirit of observation.

## LECTURE XII.

Comparison of the English and Spanish theatres.—Spirit of the romantic drama.—Shakspeare.—His age and the circumstances of his life.—How far costume is necessary, or may be dispensed with.—Shakspeare the greatest drawer of characters.—Vindication of the genuineness of his pathos.—Play on words.—Moral delicacy.—Irony.—Mixture of the tragic and comic.—The part of the fool or clown.—Shakspeare's language and versification.—Account of his several works: comedies, tragedies, and historical dramas.—Appendix on the pieces of Shakspeare said to be spurious.

**I**N conformity with the plan which we at first laid down, we shall now proceed to treat of the English and Spanish theatres.—We were compelled in passing to allude cursorily, on various occasions, sometimes to the one and sometimes to the other, partly for the sake of placing, by means of contrast, many ideas in a clearer light, and partly on account of the influence which these stages have had on the theatres of other countries. Both the English and Spaniards possess a very rich dramatic literature; both have had a number of fruitful dramatic poets of great talents, among whom even the least admired and celebrated, considered as a whole, display uncommon aptitude for dramatic animation and insight into the essence of theatrical effect. The history of their theatre has no connexion with that of the Ita-



lians and French; for it developed itself wholly from the fulness of its own strength without any foreign influence: the attempts to bring it back to an imitation of the ancients, or even of the French, have either been attended with no success, or not been made till a late period in the decay of the drama. The formation of these two stages is equally independent of each other; the Spanish poets were altogether unacquainted with the English; and in the older and most important period of the English theatre I could discover no trace of any knowledge of Spanish plays, (though their novels and romances were certainly known); and it was not till the time of Charles II. that translations from Calderon made their appearance.

So many things among men have been handed down from century to century and from nation to nation, and the human mind has in general displayed such tardiness of invention, that originality in any department of mental exertion is every where a rare phenomenon. We are desirous of seeing the result of the efforts of enterprising heads when they proceed straight forward in invention, without concerning themselves with what has elsewhere been carried to a high degree of perfection; when they lay the foundation of the new edifice on uncovered ground, and derive all the preparations, all the building materials, from their own means. We participate, in some measure, in the joy of success, when we see them advance rapidly from their first helplessness and necessity to a finished mastery in their art. The history of the Grecian theatre would

afford us this cheering prospect could we witness its rudest beginnings, which were not preserved, for they were not even committed to writing; but it is easy, when we compare together Æschylus and Sophocles, to form some idea of the preceding period. The Greeks neither inherited nor borrowed their dramatic art from any other people; it was original and native, and for that very reason it could produce a living and powerful effect. But it ended with the period when Greeks imitated Greeks; namely, when the Alexandrian poets began learnedly and critically to compose dramas after the model of the great tragic writers. The reverse of this was the case with the Romans: they received the form and substance of their dramas from the Greeks; they never attempted to act according to their own discretion, and to express their own way of thinking; and hence they occupy so insignificant a place in the history of dramatic art. Among the nations of modern Europe, the English and Spaniards alone, as yet (for the German stage is but forming), possess a theatre entirely original and national, which, in its own peculiar shape, has arrived at maturity.

Those critics who consider the authority of the ancients as models to be such, that in poetry, as in all the other arts, there can be no salvation beyond the pale of imitation, affirm, that as the nations in question have not followed this course, they have brought nothing but irregular works on the stage; which, though they may possess occasional passages of splendour and beauty, as a whole, must

ever be reprobated for barbarousness and want of form. We have already, in the introductory part of these Lectures, stated our sentiments in a general manner respecting this way of thinking; but we must now examine the subject somewhat more closely.

If the assertion were founded, all that distinguishes the works of the greatest English and Spanish dramatists, a Shakspeare and a Calderon, ought to rank them beneath the ancients; they would in no manner be of any importance for theory, and could at most appear remarkable, on the assumption that the obstinacy of these nations, in refusing to comply with the rules, might have afforded more ample scope to the poets to display their native originality, though at the expense of art. But even this assumption will, on a more narrow examination, appear extremely doubtful. The poetic spirit requires to be limited, that it may move within its range with a becoming liberty, as has been felt by all nations on the first invention of metre; it must act according to laws derivable from its own essence, otherwise its strength will be evaporated in boundless vacuity.

The works of genius cannot therefore be allowed to be without form; but of this there is no danger. That we may answer this objection of want of form, we must first come to an understanding respecting the meaning of form, which most critics, and more especially those who insist on a stiff regularity, understand merely in a mechanical, and not in an organical sense. Form is mechanical when, through

external influence, it is communicated to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality; as, for example, when we give a particular shape to a soft mass that it may retain the same after its induration. Organical form, again, is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination along with the complete developement of the germ. We every where discover such forms in nature throughout the whole range of living powers, from the crystallization of salts and minerals to plants and flowers, and from them to the human figure. In the fine arts, as well as in the province of nature, the highest artist, all genuine forms are organical, that is, determined by the quality of the work. In a word, the form is nothing but a significant exterior, the speaking physiognomy of each thing, disfigured by no destructive accidents, which gives a true evidence of its hidden essence.

Hence it is evident that the spirit of poetry, which, though imperishable, wanders as it were through different bodies, so often as it is newly born in the human race, must, from the nutrimental substance of an altered age, be fashioned into a body of a different conformation. The forms vary with the direction of the poetical sense; and when we give to the new kinds of poetry the old names, and judge of them according to the ideas conveyed by these names, the application of the authority of classical antiquity which we make is altogether unjustifiable. No one should be tried before a tribunal to which he does not belong. We may safely



admit, that the most of the dramatic works of the English and Spaniards are neither tragedies nor comedies in the sense of the ancients: they are romantic dramas. That the stage of a people who, in its foundation and formation, neither knew nor wished to know any thing of foreign models will possess many peculiarities, and not only deviate from, but even exhibit a striking contrast to, the theatres of other nations who had a common model for imitation before their eyes, may be very easily supposed, and we should only be astonished were it otherwise. But when in two nations differing, in a physical, moral, political, and religious respect, so widely as the English and Spanish, the stages which arose at the same time without being known to each other possess, along with external and internal diversities, the most striking features of affinity, the attention of the most thoughtless must be turned to this phenomenon; and the conjecture will naturally occur to him, that the same, or, at least, a kindred principle must have prevailed in the developement of both. This comparison, however, of the English and Spanish theatre, in their common contrast with all the dramatic literature which has grown up from imitation of the ancients, has, so far as we know, never yet been attempted. Could we raise from the dead a countryman contemporary and intelligent admirer of Shakspeare, and another of Calderón, and introduce to their acquaintance the works of the poet to which they were strangers, they would both, without doubt, considering the subject rather from a national than a general point of view, enter

with difficulty into the above idea, and have many objections to urge against it. But here a reconciling criticism \* must step in; and this perhaps may be best exercised by a German, who is free from the nationalities † of either the English or Spaniards, yet friendly from inclination to both, and prevented by no jealousy from acknowledging the greatness which has been exhibited in other countries earlier than in his own.

The similarity of the English and Spanish theatres does not merely consist in the bold neglect of the unities of place and time, and in the mixture of comic and tragic ingredients: that they were unwilling or unable to comply with the rules and with reason (which, in the meaning of certain critics, are words of equal signification) may be considered as an evidence of properties of merely a negative description; it lies much deeper, in the inmost substance of the fables, and in the essential relations, through which every deviating form becomes a true requisite that has its signification along with its validity. What they have in common with each

\* This appropriate expression was, if we mistake not, first used by *M. Adam Müller* in his *Lectures on German Science and Literature*. If, however, he gives himself out for the inventor of the thing itself, he is, to use the softest word, in an error. Long before him other Germans had endeavoured to reconcile the contrarieties of taste of different ages and nations, and to pay due homage to all genuine poetry and art. Between good and bad, it is true, no reconciliation is possible.

† This word is hardly English: but were *nationalität* to be translated *national prejudice*, it would be putting stronger language in the author's mouth than he has actually used.—TRANS.

other is the spirit of the romantic poetry dramatically pronounced. However, to explain ourselves with due limitation, the Spanish theatre, in our opinion, down to its decline and fall since the commencement of the eighteenth century, is almost altogether romantic; the English is only completely so in Shakspeare, its founder and greatest master: in later poets the romantic principle appears more or less degenerated, or is no longer perceivable, although the force introduced by it into the march of dramatic composition has been outwardly pretty well retained. The manner in which the different ways of thinking of two nations, a northern and a southern, have been expressed; the former endowed with a gloomy, the latter with a glowing imagination; the one nation possessed of a scrutinizing seriousness disposed to withdraw within themselves, the other impelled outwardly by the violence of passion; this we shall be enabled to explain in the most satisfactory manner at the close of this section, when we come to institute a parallel between Shakspeare and Calderon, the only two poets who are entitled to be called great.

Of the origin and essence of the romantic I treated in the first Lecture, and I shall here, therefore, merely mention the subject in a brief manner. The antique art and poetry separate, in a strict manner, things which are dissimilar; the romantic delights in indissoluble mixtures; all contrarieties: nature and art, poetry and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, terrestrial and celestial, life and death,

are blended together by them in the most intimate manner. > As the oldest lawgivers delivered their mandatory instructions and prescriptions in measured melodies; as this is in a fabulous manner attributed to Orpheus, the first softener of the yet untamed race of mortals: in like manner the whole of the ancient poetry and art is as it were a *rhythmical nomos* (law) an harmonious promulgation of the permanently established legislation of a world submitted to a beautiful order, and reflecting in itself the eternal images of things. The romantic poetry again is the expression of the secret attraction to a chaos which is concealed beneath the regulated creation even in its very bosom, and which is perpetually striving after new and wonderful births; the animating spirit of original love hovers here anew above the waters. The former is more simple, clear, and like to nature in the self-existent perfection of her separate works; the latter, notwithstanding its fragment-like appearance, approaches more to the secret of the universe. For the conception can only circumscribe each thing separately, but nothing can ever in truth exist separately; feeling perceives all in all at one and the same time.

Respecting the poetical species with which we are here occupied, we compared the antique tragedy to a group in sculpture: the figures correspond to the characters, their grouping to the action, and to these the consideration in both productions of art is exclusively directed as the only subject exhibited. But the romantic drama must be viewed as a large picture, where not merely figure and motion are



exhibited in richer groupes, but where even what surrounds the persons is also portrayed; where we see not merely the nearest objects, but are allowed the prospect of a considerable distance, and all this under a magical light, which assists in giving to the impression that particular determination which may be wanted.

Such a picture must be bounded in a less perfect manner than the group; for it is like a fragment cut out of the optic scene of the world. However the painter, by enclosing his foreground, by throwing the whole of his light and other means of giving due stability to the view towards the middle, will know that he must neither wander beyond the composition, nor omit any thing within it.

In the representation of the figure, painting cannot compete with sculpture, while the former only exhibits it by a deception and from a single point of view; but, on the other hand, it communicates more life to its imitations, by colours which are made to express the finest gradations of mental expression in the countenance. The look which can be given only in a very imperfect manner by sculpture enables us in painting to read much deeper in the mind, and to perceive its lightest movements. Its peculiar charm, in short, consists in this, that it enables us to see in bodily objects what is least corporeal, namely, light and air.

The very same description of beauties are peculiar to the romantic drama. It does not, like the old tragedy, separate seriousness and the action in a rigid manner from among the ingredients of life;

it embraces at once the whole of the checkered drama with all its circumstances; and while it seems only to represent subjects brought accidentally together, it satisfies the indefinite demands of fancy, buries us in reflections on the inexpressible signification of the objects which we view blended by distribution, proximity and distance, light and colouring, into one harmonious whole; and thus lends, as it were, a soul to the prospect before us.

The alternation of times and places, supposing its influence on the mind to be included in the picture, and that it comes to the aid of the theatrical perspective with reference to what is indicated in the distance or half-concealed by the objects under which it is covered; the contrast of mirth and seriousness, supposing that in degree and kind they bear a relation to each other; finally, the mixture of dialogical and lyrical ingredients, by which the poet is enabled to transform, in a greater or less degree, his characters into poetical natures: these, in my opinion, are not mere licenses but true beauties in the romantic drama. In all these points, and in many others besides, we shall find the English and Spanish works, which are particularly deserving of that name, fully alike to each other, however different they may be in other respects.

We proceed first to the English theatre, as it more early arrived at maturity than the Spanish. In both we must occupy ourselves more particularly with Shakspeare and Calderon, but in an inverted order. Shakspeare may be considered as the first of the English; any remarks on the earlier or con-

temporary antiquities of the English stage may be made in a review of its history. But Calderon had many predecessors; he is at once the summit and almost the conclusion of the dramatic art among the Spaniards.

While I wish to speak with that brevity which the nature of my subject requires of a poet in the study of whom I have employed many years of my life, I find myself in no small degree of embarrassment. I know not where to begin; for I should never be able to end, were I to say all that I have felt and thought on the perusal of his works. A more than ordinary intimacy with a poet prevents us, perhaps, from placing ourselves in the situation of those who sit down to him for the first time: we are too familiar with his most striking peculiarities, to be able to pronounce upon the first impression which they are calculated to make on others. On the other hand we ought to possess, and to have the power of communicating, more correct ideas of his mode of procedure, of his concealed or less obvious views, and of the meaning and import of his united efforts, than others whose acquaintance with him is more limited.

Shakspeare is the pride of his nation. A late poet has, with propriety, called him the genius of the British isles. He was the idol of his contemporaries; and after the interval of puritanical fanaticism, which commenced in a succeeding age, and put an end to every thing like liberal knowledge; after the reign of Charles the Second, during which his works were either not acted, or very much dis-

figured, his fame began to revive with more than its original brightness towards the beginning of the last century ; and since that period it has increased with the progress of time ; and for centuries to come, I speak with the greatest confidence, it will continue to gather strength, like an Alpine *avalanche*, at every period of its descent. As an important earnest of the future extension of his fame, we may allude to the enthusiasm with which he was naturalised in Germany, the moment that he was known. The language, and the impossibility of translating him with fidelity, will be for ever, perhaps, an invincible obstacle to his general diffusion in the South of Europe.\* In England, the greatest actors vie with each other in the characters of Shakspeare ; the printers in splendid editions of his works ; and the painters in transferring his scenes to the canvass. Like Dante, Shakspeare has received the indispensable but cumbersome honour of being treated like a classical author of antiquity. The oldest editions have been carefully collated, and where the readings seemed corrupted many improvements have been attempted ; and the whole literature of his age has been drawn forth from the oblivion to which it had been consigned, for the sake of explaining the phrases, and illustrating the allusions, of Shakspeare. Commentators have suc-

\* This impossibility extends also to France ; for it must not be supposed that a literal translation can ever be a faithful one. Mrs. Montague has sufficiently shown how wretchedly Voltaire translated some passages of Hamlet, and the first acts of Julius Cæsar, into rhymeless Alexandrines.



ceeded one another in such numbers, that their labours, with the critical controversies to which they have given rise, constitute of themselves a library of no inconsiderable magnitude. These labours are deserving of our praise and gratitude; and more especially the historical inquiries into the sources from which Shakspeare drew his materials, and into the former state of the English stage. But with respect to the criticisms which are merely of a philological nature, I am frequently compelled to differ from the commentators; and where they consider him merely as a poet, endeavour to pronounce upon his merits, and to enter into his views, I must separate myself from them entirely. I have hardly ever found either truth or profundity in their observations; and these critics seem to me to be but stammering interpreters of the general and almost idolatrous admiration of his countrymen. There may be people in England, who entertain the same views with themselves; and we know that a satirical poet has represented Shakspeare, with reference to his commentators, as Actæon devoured by his own dogs; and, following up the story of Ovid, exhibited a female that had written on the great poet under the figure of the snarling Lycisca.

We shall endeavour, in the first place, to remove some of the false views which have been adopted, that we may clear the way for our pure admiration, and be enabled to offer it without any hesitation or reserve.

From all the accounts which have come down to us, we learn that the contemporaries of Shakspeare

knew well what they possessed in him; and that they felt and understood him better than they did the most of those who succeeded him. In those days a work was generally ushered into the world with commendatory verses; and one of the productions of this nature, in an early edition of Shakspeare, by an unknown author, contains some of the most beautiful and happy lines that ever were applied to any poet.\* An idea, however, soon became prevalent that Shakspeare was a rude and wild genius, who poured forth at random and without aim or object his unconnected compositions. Ben Jonson, a younger contemporary and rival of Shakspeare, who laboured in the sweat of his brow, but with no great success, to form the English stage on the model of the ancients, was of opinion that he did not blot enough, and because he did not possess much school-learning, that he owed more to nature than to art. The learned, and sometimes rather pedantic, Milton was also of this opinion, when he says,

Our sweetest Shakspeare, fancy's child,  
Warbles his native wood-notes wild.

Yet it is highly honourable to Milton, that the sweetness of Shakspeare, the quality which of all others has been least allowed, was felt and acknowledged by him. The modern editors, both in their prefaces, which may be considered as so many rhetorical exercises in praise of the poet, and in

\* It begins with the words: *A mind reflecting ages past*, and is subscribed, I. M. S.

their separate observations, go still a great deal farther. They not only admit the irregularity of his pieces, according to principles which are not applicable to them, but they accuse him of bombast, of a confused, ungrammatical, and conceited mode of writing, and even of the most contemptible buffoonery. Pope asserts, that he wrote both better and worse than any other man. All the scenes and passages which did not suit the littleness of his taste he wished to place to the account of interpolating players; and he was in the right road, had his opinion been taken, of mangling Shakspeare in a most disgraceful manner. We are not therefore to be astonished if foreigners, with the exception of Germans of latter times, have, from ignorance, improved upon these opinions.\* They speak of Shakspeare's plays as monstrous productions, which could only have been given to the world by a disordered imagination in a barbarous age; and Voltaire crowns the whole with more than usual assurance, when he observes that *Hamlet*, the profound master-piece of the philosophical poet, "appears the work of a drunken savage." That foreigners, and Frenchmen in particular, who fre-

\* Lessing was the first to speak of Shakspeare in a becoming tone; but he said unfortunately a great deal too little of him, as in the time when he wrote the *Dramaturgie* this poet had not yet appeared on our stage. Since that time he has been more particularly noticed by Herder in the *Blättern von deutscher Art und Kunst*; Goethe, in *Wilhelm Meister*; and Tieck, in Letters on Shakspeare (*Poetisches Journal*, 1800), which break off, however, almost at the commencement.

quently speak in the most strange language of antiquity and the middle ages, as if cannibalism had been first put an end to in Europe by Louis XIV. should entertain this opinion of Shakspeare, might be pardonable; but that Englishmen should adopt such a calumnation of that glorious epoch of their history, in which the foundation of their greatness was laid,\* is to me incomprehensible. Shakspeare flourished and wrote in the last half of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and the first half of that of James I.; and consequently under monarchs who were learned themselves, and held literature in honour. The policy of modern Europe, by which the relations of its different states have been so variously interwoven, commenced a century before. The cause of the protestants was decided by the accession of Elizabeth to the throne; and the attachment to the ancient belief cannot therefore be urged as a proof of the prevailing darkness. Such was the zeal for the study of the ancients, that even court ladies,

\* The English work with which foreigners of every country are perhaps best acquainted is Hume's History; and there we have a most unjustifiable account both of Shakspeare and his age. "Born in a *rude age*, and educated in the lowest manner, without any instruction either *from the world* or from books." How could a man of Hume's acuteness suppose for a moment that a poet, whose characters display such an intimate acquaintance with life, who, as an actor and manager of a theatre, must have come in contact with all descriptions of individuals, had no instruction from the world? But this is not the worst; he goes even so far as to say, "a reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold." This is nearly as offensive as Voltaire's "drunken savage."—TRANS.



and the Queen herself, were intimately acquainted with Latin and Greek, and could speak the former with fluency; a degree of knowledge which we should in vain seek for in the European courts of the present day. The trade and navigation of the English, which they carried on with all the four quarters of the world, made them acquainted with the customs and mental productions of other nations; and it would appear that they were then more indulgent to foreign manners than they are in the present day. Italy had already produced nearly all for which her literature is distinguished; and translations were diligently, and even successfully, executed in verse from the Italians. They were not unacquainted with the Spanish literature, for it is certain that *Don Quixote* was read in England soon after its first appearance. Bacon, the founder of modern experimental philosophy, and of whom it may be said, that he carried in his pocket all that merits the name of philosophy in the eighteenth century, was a contemporary of Shakespeare. His fame, as a writer, did not indeed burst forth till after his death; but what a number of ideas must have been in circulation before such an author could arise! Many branches of human knowledge have, since that time, been cultivated to a greater extent, but merely those branches which are totally unproductive to poetry: chemistry, mechanics, manufactures, and rural and political economy, will never enable a man to become a poet. I have elsewhere\* examined into the pre-

\* In my Lectures on the *Spirit of the Age*.

tensions of modern cultivation, as it is called, which looks down with such contempt on all preceding ages; I have shown that it is all little, superficial, and unsubstantial at bottom. The pride of what has been called the present maturity of human reason has come to a miserable end; and the structures erected by those pedadogues of the human race have fallen to pieces like the baby-houses of children.

The tone of society at present compels us to remark, that there is a wide difference between cultivation and what is called polish. That artificial polish which puts an end to every thing like original communication, and subjects all intercourse to the insipid uniformity of certain rules, was undoubtedly unknown in the age of Shakspeare, as it is still in a great measure in England in the present day. They possessed the consciousness of healthful energy, which always expressed itself boldly, though often petulantly. The spirit of chivalry was not yet extinguished; and a Queen who required the observance of much more regard for her sex than for her dignity, and who, from her determination, wisdom, and magnanimity, was, in fact, well qualified to infuse an ardent enthusiasm into the minds of her subjects, inflamed that spirit to the most noble love of glory and renown. Remains of the feudal independence were also still in existence; the nobility vied with each other in splendour of dress and number of retinue, and every great lord had a sort of small court of his own. The distinction of ranks was yet strongly marked;

and this is what is most to be wished for by the dramatic poet. In discourse they were delighted with quick and unexpected answers ; and the witty sally passed rapidly like a ball from mouth to mouth, till it could no longer be kept up. This, and the excessive extent to which a play on words was carried (for which King James himself had a great fondness, so that we need not wonder at the universality of the mode), may be considered in the light of bad taste ; but to take it for a symptom of rudeness and barbarity, is not less absurd than to infer the poverty of a people from their luxurious extravagance. These strained repartees frequently occur in Shakspeare, with the view of painting the actual tone of the society of his day ; it does not follow, however, that they met with his approbation, but, on the contrary, it appears that he held them in derision. Hamlet says, in the scene with the Grave-digger, “ By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it ; the age is grown so picked, that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe.” And Lorenzo, in the *Merchant of Venice*, alluding to Launcelot :

O dear discretion, how his words are suited !  
The fool hath planted in his memory  
An army of good words : and I do know  
A many fools, that stand in better place,  
Garnish'd like him, that for a tricky word  
Defy the matter.

Besides, Shakspeare, in a thousand places, lays an uncommonly great stress on the correct and refined

tone of good company, and warns against every deviation from it either through boorishness or affected foppery; he not only gives the most admirable lectures on the subject, but he represents it in all its gradations in every rank, age, and sex.—What foundation is there, then, for the alleged barbarity of that age? Its indecency? But if this is to be admitted as a test, then the ages of Pericles and Augustus must also be described as rude and uncultivated; for Aristophanes and Horace, who both were considered as models of urbanity, display at times the coarsest indelicacy. The diversity in the moral feeling of nations on this subject depends on other causes. It is true that Shakspeare sometimes introduces us to improper company; at other times he suffers ambiguous expressions to be used in the presence of women, and even by women themselves. This species of petulance was probably not then unusual. He certainly did not do so to please the multitude, for in many of his pieces there is not the slightest trace of any thing of this sort to be found; and what virgin tenderness does he not preserve throughout many of his female characters! When we see the liberties taken by other dramatic poets in England in his time, and even much later, we must account him comparatively chaste and moral. Neither must we overlook certain circumstances in the then state of the theatre. The female parts were not acted by women, but by boys; and no person of the fair sex appeared in the theatre without a mask. Under such a carnival disguise, much might be heard by them, and much



might be ventured to be said in their presence, which, in other circumstances, would have been quite unsuitable. It is certainly to be wished that decency should be observed on all public occasions, and consequently also on the stage; but even in this it is possible to go too far. That censorious spirit, which scents out impurity in every sally of a bold and vivacious description, is at best but an ambiguous criterion of purity of morals; and there is frequently concealed under this hypocrisy the consciousness of an impure imagination. The determination to tolerate nothing which has the least reference to the sensual relation between the two sexes may be carried to a pitch extremely oppressive to a dramatic poet, and injurious to the boldness and freedom of his composition. If considerations of such a nature were to be attended to, many of the happiest parts of the plays of Shakspeare, for example, in *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*, which are handled with a due regard to decency, must be set aside for their impropriety.

Had no other monument of the age of Elizabeth come down to us than the works of Shakspeare, I should, from them alone, have formed the most advantageous idea of its state of social cultivation. Those who look through such strange spectacles as to find nothing in them but rudeness and barbarity, when they cannot deny what I have just now advanced, have no other resource for themselves but to say, "What has Shakspeare to do with the cultivation of his age? He had no share in it. Born

in a low situation, ignorant and uneducated, he passed his life in low society, and laboured for bread to please a vulgar audience, without ever dreaming of fame or posterity."

In all this there is not a single word of truth, though it has been repeated a thousand times. We know, it is true, very little of the life of the poet; and what we do know, for the most part, consists of raked up anecdotes of a very suspicious nature, nearly of such a description as those which are told at inns to inquisitive strangers, who wish to know something of a celebrated man in the place where he lives. The first actual document which enabled us to have a peep into his family concerns was the discovery of his will. It betrayed an extraordinary deficiency of critical acumen in the commentators of Shakspeare, that none of them, as far as we know, have ever thought of availing themselves of his sonnets for tracing the circumstances of his life. These sonnets paint most unequivocally the actual situation and sentiments of the poet; they enable us to become acquainted with the passions of the man; they even contain the most remarkable confessions of his youthful errors. Shakspeare's father was a man of property, whose ancestors had held the office of magistrate in Stratford, and in a diploma from the Herald's Office, for the renewal or confirmation of his coat of arms, he is styled *Gentleman*. Our poet, the oldest of four children, could not, it is true, receive an academical education, as he married when hardly eighteen, probably in consequence of family arrangements. In this

private way of life he continued but a very few years; and he was either enticed to London from the wearisomeness of his situation, or banished from home, as it is said, in consequence of his irregularities. He there resorted to the situation of player, which he considered at first as a degradation, principally because he was seduced by the example of his comrades to participate in their wild and irregular manner of life.\* It is extremely probable, that by the poetical fame which he acquired in the progress of his career, he was the principal means of ennobling the stage, and bringing the situation of a player into better repute. Even at a very early age he endeavoured to distinguish himself as a poet in other walks than those of the stage, as is proved by his juvenile poems of *Adonis* and *Lucrece*. He afterwards obtained the situation of joint proprietor and manager of the theatre for which he laboured. That he was not admitted to the society of persons of distinction is altogether incredible; besides many others, he found in the Earl of Southampton, the friend of the unfortunate Essex, a most liberal and kind patron. His pieces were not merely the delight of the million, but in great

\* In one of his sonnets he says:—

O, for my sake do you with fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of my harmless deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide,  
*Than public means which public manners breeds.*

And in the following:—

Your love and pity doth the impression fill,  
Which *vulgar scandal* stamp'd upon my brow.

favour at court: the two monarchs under whose reigns he wrote were, according to the testimony of a contemporary, altogether taken with him.\* They were acted at court; and Elizabeth appears herself to have given occasion to the writing of more than one of them for the celebration of her court festivals. It is known that King James honoured Shakspeare so far as to write to him with his own hand. All this looks very unlike either contempt or banishment into the obscurity of a low circle. Shakspeare acquired, by his activity as a poet, player, and stage-manager, a considerable property, which he enjoyed in his native spot, in retirement and in the society of a beloved daughter, in the last years of his too short life. Immediately after his death a monument was erected over his grave, which may be considered sumptuous for those times.

Amidst such brilliant success, and with such distinguished proofs of respect and honour from his contemporaries, it would be singular indeed, if Shakspeare, notwithstanding the modesty of a great mind, which he certainly possessed in a peculiar degree, should never have dreamed of posthumous fame. As a profound thinker he had pretty accurately taken the measure of the circle of human capabilities, and he could say to himself with confidence, that many of his productions would not easily be surpassed. What foundation then is there for the

\* Ben Jonson :—

And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,  
That so did take Eliza and our James !



contrary assertion, which would degrade the immortal artist to the situation of a daily labourer for a rude multitude? Merely this, that he himself published no edition of his whole works. We do not reflect, that a poet, always accustomed to labour immediately for the stage, who has often enjoyed the triumph of overpowering assembled crowds of spectators, and drawing from them the most tumultuous applause, who is not dependent on the caprice of vitiated stage directors, but left to his own discretion in the selection of a proper mode of theatrical composition, cares naturally much less for the closet of the solitary reader. In the first formation of a national stage, more especially, we find frequent examples of such negligence. Of the almost innumerable pieces of Lope de Vega, many undoubtedly never were printed, and are thereby lost; and Cervantes did not print his earlier dramas, though he certainly boasts of them as meritorious works. As Shakspeare, on his retiring from the theatre, left his manuscripts behind with his fellow managers, he might rely on theatrical tradition for handing them down to posterity, which would indeed have been sufficient for that purpose, if the closing of the theatres, under the oppression of the puritans, had not interrupted the natural order of things. We know, besides, that the poets used then to sell the exclusive possession of their pieces to a theatre:\*

\* This is still perhaps not uncommon in some countries. The Venetian Director Medebach, for whose company many of Goldoni's comedies were composed, claimed an exclusive right to their property.—TRANS.

it is therefore not improbable that the right of property in his unprinted pieces was no longer vested in Shakspeare, or had not at least yet reverted to him. His fellow managers entered on the publication seven years after his death (which probably surprised him in the intention) as it would appear on their own account, and for their own advantage.

The ignorance or learning of our poet has been the subject of endless controversy, and yet it is a matter of the easiest determination. Shakspeare was poor in dead learning, but he possessed a fulness of living and applicable knowledge. He knew Latin, and even something of Greek, though not, probably, enough to read the writers with ease in the original language. Of the modern languages, the French and Italian, he had also but a superficial acquaintance. The general direction of his inclination was not towards the collection of words but of facts. He had a very extensive acquaintance with English books, original and translated: we may safely affirm, that he had read all that his language then contained which could be of any use to him in any of his poetical objects. He was sufficiently intimate with mythology to employ it in the only manner he wished, as a symbolical ornament. He had formed the most correct notions of the spirit of ancient history and more particularly of that of the Romans; and the history of his own country was familiar to him even in detail. Fortunately for him it had not yet been treated in a diplomatic and pragmatistical, but merely in the chronicle stile; that is, it had not yet assumed the appearance of dry investiga-

tions respecting the developement of political relations, diplomatical transactions, finances, &c. but exhibited a visible image of the living and moving of an age full of distinguished deeds. Shakspeare was an attentive observer of nature; he knew the technical language of mechanics and artisans; he seems to have been well travelled in the interior of England, and to have been a diligent inquirer of navigators respecting other countries; and he was most accurately acquainted with all the popular usages, opinions, and traditions which could be of use in poetry.

The proofs of his ignorance, on which the greatest stress is laid, are a few geographical blunders and anachronisms. Because in a comedy founded on a tale, he makes ships land in Bohemia, he has been the subject of laughter. But I conceive that we should be very unjust towards him, were we to conclude that he did not, as well as ourselves, possess the valuable but by no means difficult knowledge that Bohemia is nowhere bounded by the sea. He could never, in that case, have looked into a map of Germany, whereas he describes the maps of both Indies with the discoveries of the latest navigators.\* In such matters Shakspeare is only faithful in the historical subjects of his own country. In the novels on which he worked, he avoided disturbing his audience to whom they were known, by the correction of errors in secondary things. The more wonderful the story, the more it

\* *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*—Act. iii. Sc. ii.

ranged in a purely poetical region, which he transfers at will to an indefinite distance. These plays, whatever names they bear, take place in the true land of romance and in the century of wonderful love stories. He knew well that in the forest of Ardenne, there were neither the lions and serpents of the Torrid Zone, nor the shepherdesses of Arcadia: but he transferred both to it,\* because the design and import of his picture required them. Here he considered himself entitled to the greatest liberties. He had not to do with a petty hypercritical age like ours, which is always seeking in poetry for something else than poetry; his audience entered the theatre, not to learn true chronology, geography, and natural history, but to witness a vivid exhibition. I undertake to prove that Shakespeare's anachronisms are, for the most part, committed purposely, and after great consideration. It was frequently of importance to him to bring the subject exhibited, from the back ground of time, quite near to us. Hence in Hamlet, though avowedly an old northern story, there prevails the tone of modish society, and in every respect the costume of the most recent period. Without those circumstantialities it would not have been allowable to make a philosophical inquirer of Hamlet, on which however the sense of the whole is made to rest. On that account he mentions his education at a university, though in the age of the historical Hamlet there was not yet any university. He

\* *As You Like It.*



makes him study at Wittenberg, and no selection could be more suitable. The name was very popular: from the story of Dr. Faustus, of Wittenberg it was wonderfully well known; it was of particular celebrity in protestant England, as Luther had taught and written there shortly before, and the very name must have immediately suggested the idea of freedom in thinking. I cannot even consider it an anachronism that Richard the Third should speak of Macchiavel. The word is here used altogether proverbially: the contents of the book of the prince have been in existence even since the existence of tyrants; Macchiavel was merely the first to commit them to writing.

That Shakspeare has accurately hit the essential costume, namely, the spirit of ages and nations, is at least generally acknowledged by the English critics; but many sins against the external costume may be easily remarked. Here we must bear in mind that the Roman pieces were acted upon the stage of that day in the European dress. This was, it is true, still beautiful and noble, not so silly and tasteless as it became towards the end of the seventeenth century. Brutus and Cassius appeared in the Spanish cloak; they wore, quite contrary to the Roman custom, the sword by their side in time of peace, and drew it, according to the testimony of an eye witness\* in the dialogue where Brutus stimulates Cassius to the conspiracy, as if involuntarily, half

\* In one of the commendatory poems in the first folio edition:

And on the stage at *half sword parley* were  
Brutus and Cassius.

out of the sheath. This will in no wise answer our way of thinking : we are not contented without the Toga. The present may not be an unsuitable place for delivering a general observation respecting costume, considered with reference to art. It has never been more accurately observed than in the present day ; art has become a pedantic antiquity slop-shop. This is because we live in a learned and critical, but by no means poetical age. The ancients used to represent the religions of other nations, which deviated very much from their own, according to the Greek mythology. In sculpture the same dress, namely, the Phrygian, was adopted, once for all, for every barbaric tribe. Not that they did not know that there were as many different dresses as nations ; but in art they merely wished to acknowledge the great contrast between barbarian and cultivated : and this appeared to them to be rendered most advantageously visible in the Phrygian clothing. The more early Christian painters represent the Saviour, the Virgin Mary, the Patriarchs, and Apostles in an ideal dress ; but the subordinate actors or spectators of the action, in the dresses of their own nation and age. Here they were guided by a correct feeling : the mysteriously sacred ought to be kept in an awe-inspiring distance, but the human can only be properly understood when seen with the usual accompaniments. In the middle ages all heroical stories of antiquity, from Theseus and Achilles down to Alexander, were metamorphosed into true books of chivalry. What was related to themselves alone spoke an intelligible

language to them; of differences and distinctions they did not wish to know. In an old manuscript of the Trojan war, I saw a miniature picture representing the funeral procession of Hector, where the coffin, hung with noble coats of arms, is carried into a gothic church. It is easy to make ourselves merry with this piece of simplicity, but a reflecting mind will view the subject in a very different light. A powerful consciousness of the universal prevalency and the solid consistency of their manner of being, an undoubted conviction that it has always so been and will continue so to be in the world: these feelings of our ancestors were symptoms of the fresh fulness of life; they were the marrow of action in real life as well as in poetry. Their plain and affectionate attachment to every thing around them, handed down from their fathers, is by no means to be confounded with the obstreperous vanity of ages of mannerism, which vainly introduce the fleeting modes and fashion of the day into art, because every thing, like a noble simplicity, seems to them boorish and rude. This last impropriety is now abolished: our poets and artists must, like servants, wear the livery of distant centuries and foreign nations if they would hope for our approbation. We are every where at home, except at home. We do ourselves the justice to allow that the present mode of dressing, forms of politeness, &c. are altogether unpoetical, and art is therefore obliged to beg, as an alms, a poetical costume from the antiquaries. To that simple way of thinking, which is merely attentive to the inward truth

of the composition without stumbling at anachronisms, or other external inconsistencies, we cannot, alas ! now return ; but we must envy the poets to whom they occurred ; they allowed them a great breadth and freedom in the handling of their subject.

Many things in Shakspeare must be judged of according to the above principles, respecting the essential and the merely learned costume ; and they will also admit of an application to Calderon.

So much with respect to the spirit of the age in which Shakspeare lived, and his peculiar cultivation and knowledge. To me he appears a profound artist, and not a blind and wildly luxuriant genius. I consider, generally speaking, all that has been said on this subject as a mere fabulous story, a blind and extravagant error. In other arts the assertion refutes itself ; for in them acquired knowledge is an indispensable condition before any thing can be performed. But even in such poets, as are usually given out for careless pupils of nature, without any art or school discipline, I have always found, on a nearer consideration, when they have really produced works of excellence, a distinguished cultivation of the mental powers, practice in art, and views worthy in themselves and maturely considered. This applies to Homer as well as Dante. The activity of genius is, it is true, natural to it, and in a certain sense unconscious ; and consequently the person who possesses it is not always at the moment able to render an account of the course which he may have pursued ; but it by no means follows that the thinking power had not a great share in it.



It is from the very rapidity and certainty of the mental process, from the utmost clearness of understanding, that thinking in a poet is not perceived as something abstracted, does not wear the appearance of meditation\* (after thought). That idea of poetical inspiration, which many lyrical poets have brought into circulation, as if they were not in their senses, and like Pythia, when possessed by the divinity, delivered oracles unintelligible to themselves (a mere lyrical invention), is least of all applicable to dramatic composition, one of the productions of the human mind which requires the greatest exercise of thought. It is admitted that Shakspeare has reflected, and deeply reflected, on character and passion, on the progress of events and human destinies, on the human constitution, on all the things and relations of the world; this is an admission which must be made, for one alone of thousands of his maxims would be a sufficient refutation of whoever should attempt to deny it. So that it was only then respecting the structure of his own pieces that he had no thought to spare? This he left to the the dominion of chance, which blew together the atoms of Epicurus? But supposing that he had, without the higher ambition of acquiring the appro-

\* The word in the original is equivalent to meditation; *nachdenken* is composed of two words, *nach* after, and *denken* to think, and literally means *after-thinking*. The analogy does not hold in our language. Meditate is derived from *meditor*, and that from the Greek *μελετάω* (*curam gero*). The farthest back we can go is *μελεῖν*. The word reflection however, in Latin, means primarily to *bend, or turn back*.—TRANS.

bation of judicious critics and posterity, without the love of art which endeavours at self-satisfaction in a perfect work, merely laboured to please the unlettered crowd ; this very object alone and the theatrical effect, would have led him to bestow attention to the conduct of his pieces. For does not the impression of a drama depend in an especial manner on the relation of the parts to each other ? And however beautiful a scene may be in itself, will it not be at once reprobated by spectators merely possessed of plain sense who give themselves up to nature, whenever it is at variance with what they are led to expect at that particular place, and destroys the interest which they have already begun to take ? The comic intermixtures may be considered as a sort of interlude, for the purpose of refreshing the spectators after the straining of their minds in following the more serious parts, if no better purpose can be found for them ; but in the progress of the main action, in the concatenation of the events, the poet must, if possible, display even more superiority of understanding than in the composition of individual character and situations, otherwise he would be like the conductor of a puppet-show who has confused the wires, so that the puppets, from their mechanism, undergo quite different movements from those which he actually intended.

The English critics are unanimous in their praise of the truth and uniform consistency of his characters, of his heart-rending pathos, and his comic wit. Moreover, they extol the beauty and sublimity of his separate descriptions, images, and expressions.

This last is the most superficial and cheap mode of criticising works of art. Johnson compares him, who should endeavour to recommend this poet by passages unconnectedly torn from his works, to the pedant in Hierocles, who exhibited a brick as a sample of his house. And yet he himself speaks so little, and so very unsatisfactorily, of the pieces considered as a whole ! Let any man, for instance, bring together the short characters which he gives at the close of each play, and see if the aggregate will amount to that sum of admiration which he himself, at his outset, has stated as the correct standard for the appretiation of the poet. It was, generally speaking, the prevailing tendency of the time which preceded our own ; a tendency displayed also in physical science, to consider what is possessed of life as a mere accumulation of dead parts, to separate what exists only in connexion and cannot otherwise be conceived, instead of penetrating to the central point and viewing all the parts as so many irradiations from it. Hence nothing is so rare as a critic who can elevate himself to the contemplation of an extensive work of art. Shakspeare's compositions, from the very depth of purpose displayed in them, have been exposed to the misfortune of being misunderstood. Besides, this prosaical species of criticism applies always the poetical form to the details of execution ; but in so far as the plan of the piece is concerned, it never looks for more than the logical connexion of causes and effects, or some partial and trivial moral by way of application ; and all that cannot be reconciled to this is declared a

superfluous, or even a detrimental, addition. On these principles we must equally strike out the most of the choral songs of the Greek tragedies, which also contribute nothing to the developement of the action, but are merely an harmonious echo of the impressions aimed at by the poet. In this they altogether mistake the rights of poetry and the nature of the romantic drama, which, for the very reason that it is and ought to be picturesque, requires richer accompaniments and contrasts for its main groupes. In all art and poetry, but more especially in the romantic, the fancy lays claims to be considered as an independent mental power governed according to its own laws.

In an essay on *Romeo and Juliet*,\* written a number of years ago, I went through the whole of the scenes in their order, and demonstrated the inward necessity of each with reference to the whole; I showed why such a particular circle of characters and relations was placed around the two lovers; I explained the signification of the mirth here and there scattered, and justified the use of the occasional heightening given to the poetical colours. From all this it seemed to follow unquestionably, that with the exception of a few plays of wit now become unintelligible or foreign to the present taste, (imitations of the tone of society of that day) nothing could be taken away, nothing added, nothing otherwise arranged, without mutilating and disfiguring the perfect work. I should

\* In the first volume of *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, published by my brother and myself.



be ready to undertake the same thing in all the pieces of Shakspeare produced in his maturer years, but this would require a separate book. Here I am reduced to confine my observations to the tracing his great designs with a rapid pencil ; but still I must previously be allowed to deliver my sentiments in a general manner on the subject of his most distinguishing properties.

Shakspeare's knowledge of mankind has become proverbial : in this his superiority is so great, that he has justly been called the master of the human heart. A readiness in remarking even the nicer involuntary demonstrations of the mind, and the expressing with certainty the meaning of these signs acquired from experience and reflection, constitutes the observer of men ; acuteness in drawing still farther conclusions from them, and in arranging the separate observations according to grounds of probability in a connected manner, may be said to be knowing men. The distinguishing property of the dramatic poet who is great in characterization is something altogether different from this, which either, take it which way we will, includes in it this readiness and this acuteness, or dispenses with both. It is the capability of transporting himself so completely into every situation, even the most unusual, that he is enabled, as plenipotentiary of the whole human race, without particular instructions for each separate case, to act and speak in the name of every individual. It is the power of endowing the creatures of his imagination with such self-existent energy, that they afterwards act in each conjuncture

according to general laws of nature: the poet, in his dreams, institutes as it were experiments which are received with as much authority as if they had been made on real objects. The inconceivable in this, and what never can be learned, is, that the characters appear neither to do nor to say any thing on account of the spectator; and yet that the poet, by means of the exhibition itself without any subsidiary explanation, communicates the gift of looking into the inmost recesses of their minds. Hence Goëthe has ingeniously compared Shakspeare's characters to watches with crystalline plates and cases, which, while they point out the hours as correctly as other watches, enable us at the same time to perceive the inward springs whereby all this is accomplished.

Nothing, however, is more foreign to Shakspeare than a certain dissecting mode of composition, which laboriously enumerates to us all the motives by which a man is determined to act in this or that particular manner. This way of accounting for motives, the rage of many of the modern historians, might be carried at length to an extent which would abolish every thing like individuality, and resolve all character into nothing but the effect of foreign or external influences, while we know that it frequently announces itself in the most decided manner in the earliest infancy. After all, a man acts so because he is so. And how each man is constituted, Shakspeare reveals to us in the most immediate manner: he demands and obtains our belief, even for what is singular and deviates from the ordinary course of

nature. Never perhaps was there so comprehensive a talent for characterization as Shakspeare's. It not only grasps the diversities of rank, sex, and age, down to the dawnings of infancy; not only do the king and the beggar, the hero and the pickpocket, the sage and the idiot, speak and act with equal truth; not only does he transport himself to distant ages and foreign nations, and portray in the most accurate manner, with only a few apparent violations of costume, the spirit of the ancient Romans, of the French in their wars with the English, of the English themselves during a great part of their history, of the Southern Europeans (in the serious part of many comedies), the cultivated society of that time, and the former rude and barbarous state of the North; his human characters have not only such depth and precision that they cannot be arranged under classes, and are inexhaustible even in conception: no, this Promethens not merely forms men, he opens the gates of the magical world of spirits, calls up the midnight ghost, exhibits before us his witches amidst their unhallowed mysteries, peoples the air with sportive fairies and sylphs; and these beings existing only in imagination possess such truth and consistency, that even when deformed monsters like Caliban, he extorts the assenting conviction, if there should be such beings they would so conduct themselves. In a word, as he carries with him the most fruitful and daring fancy into the kingdom of nature, on the other hand, he carries nature into the regions of fancy, lying beyond the confines

of reality. We are lost in astonishment at seeing the extraordinary, the wonderful, and the unheard of, in such intimate nearness.

Pope and Johnson appear to contradict each other in a singular manner, when the first says, all the characters of Shakspeare are individuals, and the second, they are species. And yet perhaps these opinions may admit of reconciliation. Pope's expression is unquestionably the more correct. A character which should merely be a personification of a naked general idea could neither exhibit any great depth nor any great variety. The names of genera and species are well known to be merely auxiliaries for the understanding, that we may embrace the infinite variety of nature in a certain order. The characters which Shakspeare has thoroughly delineated possess undoubtedly a number of individual peculiarities, but at the same time a signification which is not applicable to them alone: they generally supply materials for a profound theory of their distinguishing property. But even with the above correction, this opinion must still have its limitations. Characterisation is merely one ingredient of the dramatic art, and not dramatic poetry itself. It would be improper in the extreme, if the poet were to draw our attention to superfluous traits of character, when he ought to endeavour to produce other impressions. Whenever the musical or the fanciful preponderate, the characteristical is necessarily thrown into the back ground. Hence many of the figures of Shakspeare exhibit merely external designations, determined by the place



which they occupy in the whole: they are like secondary persons in a public procession, to whose physiognomy we seldom pay much attention; their only importance is derived from the solemnity of their dress and the object in which they are engaged. Shakspeare's messengers, for instance, are for the most part merely messengers, yet not common, but poetical messengers: the messages which they have to bring is the soul which suggests to them their language. Other voices too are merely raised as melodious lamentations or rejoicings, or reflections on what has taken place; and in a serious drama without chorus this must always be more or less the case, if we would not have it prosaical.

If Shakspeare deserves our admiration for his characters, he is equally deserving of it for his exhibition of passion, taking this word in its widest signification, as including every mental condition, every tone from indifference or familiar mirth to the wildest rage and despair. He gives us the history of minds; he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions. His passions do not at first stand displayed to us in all their height, as is the case with so many tragic poets who, in the language of Lessing, are thorough masters of the legal style of love. He paints, in a most inimitable manner, the gradual progress from the first origin; "he gives," as Lessing says, "a living picture of all the most minute and secret artifices by which a feeling steals into our souls, of all the imperceptible advantages which it there gains, of all the stratagems by which every other passion is made

subservient to it, till it becomes the sole tyrant of our desires and our aversions." Of all poets, perhaps, he alone has portrayed the mental diseases, melancholy, delirium, lunacy, with such inexpressible and, in every respect, definite truth, that the physician may enrich his observations from them in the same manner as from real cases.

And yet Johnson has objected to Shakspeare that his pathos is not always natural and free from affectation. There are, it is true, passages, though comparatively speaking very few, where his poetry exceeds the bounds of true dialogue, where a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit, rendered the complete dramatic forgetfulness of himself impossible. With this exception, the censure originates only in a fanciless way of thinking, to which every thing appears unnatural that does not suit its tame insipidity. Hence an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery and nowise elevated above every day life. But energetical passions electrify the whole of the mental powers, and will consequently, in highly favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figurative manner. It has been often remarked that indignation gives wit; and as despair occasionally breaks out into laughter, it may sometimes also give vent to itself in antithetical comparisons.

Besides, the rights of the poetical form have not been duly weighed. Shakspeare, who was always sure of his object, to move in a sufficiently powerful manner when he wished to do so, has occa-

sionally, by indulging in a freer play, purposely moderated the impressions when too painful, and immediately introduced a musical alleviation of our sympathy.\* He had not those rude ideas of his art which many moderns seem to have, as if the poet, like the clown in the proverb, must strike twice on the same place. An ancient rhetorician delivered a caution against dwelling too long on the excitation of pity; for nothing, he said, dries so soon as tears; and Shakspeare acted conformably to this ingenious maxim without knowing it. The paradoxical assertion of Johnson that Shakspeare had a greater talent for comedy than tragedy, and that in the latter he has frequently displayed an affected tone, does not even deserve to be so far noticed that we should adduce, by way of refutation, the great tragical compositions of the poet which, for overpowering effect, leave almost every thing which the stage has yet seen far behind them; a few of the much less celebrated scenes would be quite sufficient. What might to many readers lend an appearance of truth to this opinion are the plays on words, which, not unfrequently in Shakspeare, are introduced into serious and sublime passages, and into those also of a peculiarly pathetic nature. I have already stated the point of view in which we ought to consider the sportive plays on words. I

\* A contemporary of the poet, the author of the poem before alluded to, tenderly felt this while he says:—

Yet so to temper passion, that our ears  
Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears  
Both smile and weep.

shall here, therefore, merely deliver a few observations respecting a play on words in general, and its poetical use.—A thorough investigation would lead us too far from our subject, and too deeply into considerations on the essence of language, and its relation to poetry, or rhyme, &c. There is in the human mind a desire that language should exhibit the object which it denotes in a sensible manner by sound, which may be traced even as far back as the origin of poetry. As, in the shape in which language comes down to us, this is seldom the case in a perceptible degree, an imagination which has been powerfully excited is fond of laying hold of the congruity in sound which may accidentally offer itself, that by such means he may, in a single case, restore the lost resemblance between the word and the thing. For example, it was common to seek in the name of a person, though often accidentally bestowed, a reference to his qualities and fortune,—it was purposely converted into an expressive name. Those who cry out against plays on words as an unnatural and affected invention only betray their own ignorance. With children, as well as nations of the most simple manners, a great inclination to them is often displayed, as correct ideas respecting the derivation and affinity of words have not been developed among them, and do not consequently stand in the way of this caprice. In *Homer* we find several examples; the *Books of Moses*, the oldest written memorial of the primitive world, are, as is well known, full of them. On the other hand, poets of a very cultivated taste, or orators like Cicero,



have delighted in them. Whoever, in *Richard the Second*, is disgusted with the affecting play of words of the dying John of Gaunt on his own name, let him remember that the same thing occurs in the *Ajax* of Sophocles. We do not mean to say that all plays on words are on all occasions to be justified. This must depend on the disposition of mind, whether it will admit of such a play of fancy, and whether the sallies, comparisons, and allusions, which lie at the bottom of them, possess internal solidity. Yet we must not proceed upon the principle of trying how the thought appears after it is deprived of the resemblance in sound, any more than we are to endeavour to feel the charm of rhymed versification after being deprived of rhyme. The laws of good taste on this subject must also vary with the quality of the languages. In those which possess a great number of homonymes, that is, words possessing the same, or nearly the same sound, though quite different in their derivation and signification, it is almost more difficult to avoid than to fall on plays of words. It has also been dreaded lest a door might be opened to puerile witticism, if they were not proscribed in the most severe manner. I cannot find, however, that Shakspeare had such an invincible and immoderate passion for plays on words. It is true he often makes a most lavish use of this figure; in other pieces he has introduced it very sparingly; and in some of them, for example in *Macbeth*, I do not believe that the least vestige of it is to be found. Hence, in respect to the use or the rejection of plays on words, he must have

been guided by the measure of the objects, and the different style in which they required to be treated, and have followed probably, as in every thing else, principles which would bear a strict examination.

The objection that Shakspeare wounds our feelings by the open display of the most disgusting moral odiousness, harrows up the mind unmercifully, and tortures even our eyes by the exhibition of the most insupportable and hateful spectacles, is one of much greater importance. He has never, in fact, varnished over wild and blood-thirsty passions with a pleasing exterior, never clothed crime and want of principle with a false show of greatness of soul, and in that respect he is every way deserving of praise. Twice he has portrayed downright villains, and the masterly way in which he has contrived to clude impressions of too painful a nature may be seen in Iago and Richard the Third. I allow that the reading, and still more the sight, of some of his pieces are not adviseable to weak nerves, any more than the *Eumenides* of Æschylus; but is the poet, who can only reach an important object by bold and hazardous means, to allow himself to be influenced by considerations for persons of this description? If the effeminacy of the present day is to serve as a general standard of what tragical composition may exhibit to human nature, we shall be forced to set very narrow limits to art, and every thing like a powerful effect must at once be renounced. If we wish to have a grand purpose, we must also wish to have the means, and our nerves should in some measure accommodate themselves

to painful impressions when, by way of requital, our mind is thereby elevated and strengthened.—The constant reference to a petty and puny race must cripple the boldness of the poet. Fortunately for his art, Shakspeare lived in an age extremely susceptible of noble and tender impressions, but which had still enough of the firmness inherited from a vigorous olden time, not to shrink back with dismay from every strong and violent picture. We have lived to see tragedies of which the catastrophe consists in the swoon of an enamoured princess: if Shakspeare falls occasionally into the opposite extreme, it is a noble error originating in the fulness of a gigantic strength. And this tragical Titan, who storms the heavens and threatens to tear the world from off its hinges, who, more fruitful than *Æschylus*, makes our hair to stand on end, and congeals our blood with horror, possessed at the same time the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry; he plays with love like a child, and his songs are breathed out like melting sighs. He unites in his existence the utmost elevation and the utmost depth; and the most foreign, and even apparently irreconcilable properties subsist in him peaceably together. The world of spirits and nature have laid all their treasures at his feet: in strength a demi-god, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a protecting spirit of a higher order, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of his superiority, and is as open and unassuming as a child.

If the delineation of all his characters, separately

considered, is inimitably firm and correct, he surpasses even himself in so combining and contrasting them, that they serve to bring out each other.— This is the very summit of dramatic characterisation: for we can never estimate a man altogether abstractedly by himself according to his true worth; we must see him in his relations with others; and it is here that most dramatic poets are deficient. Shakspeare makes each of his principal characters the glass in which the others are reflected, and in which we are enabled to discover what could not be immediately revealed to us. What in others is most profound, lies in him at the surface. We should be very ill advised were we always to take the declarations of the characters respecting themselves and others for sterling gold. Ambiguity of intention, very properly in him, overflows with the most praise-worthy principles; and sage maxims are not unfrequently put in the mouth of imbecility, to show how easily such common place truisms may be acquired. Nobody ever painted as he has done the facility of self-deception, the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves, with which even noble minds attempt to disguise the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature. This secret irony of the characterisation is deserving of admiration as a storehouse of acuteness and sagacity; but it is the grave of enthusiasm. But this is the conclusion at which we arrive when we have had the misfortune to see human nature through and through; and besides the melancholy truth that no virtue and greatness are altogether pure and genuine, and



the dangerous error that the highest perfection is attainable, we have no remaining choice. Here we may perceive, notwithstanding his power in exciting the most fervent emotions, a certain cool indifference in the poet himself, but still the indifference of a superior mind, which has run through the circle of human existence and survived feeling.

The irony in Shakspeare has not merely a reference to the separate characters, but frequently to the whole of the action. Most poets who portray human events in a narrative or dramatic form take themselves a part, and exact from their readers a blind approbation or condemnation of whatever side they choose to support or oppose. The more zealous this rhetoric is, the more easily it fails of its effect. In every case we perceive that the subject does not come immediately before us, but that we view it through the medium of a different way of thinking. When, however, the poet, by a dexterous manœuvre, occasionally allows us a glance of the less brilliant reverse of the picture, he then places himself in a sort of secret understanding with the select circle of the intelligent among his readers or spectators ; he shows them that he previously saw and admitted the validity of their objections ; that he himself is not tied down by the subject represented, but soars freely above it ; and that, if he chose, he could unrelentingly annihilate the beautiful and irresistibly attractive scenes which his magic pen has produced. Wherever the proper tragic enters, it is true, every thing like irony immediately ceases ; but from the avowed raillery of comedy, to the point where the

subjection of mortal beings to an inevitable destiny demands the highest degree of seriousness, there are a multitude of human relations which unquestionably may be considered in an ironical view, without confounding the eternal line of separation between good and evil. This purpose is answered by the comic characters and scenes which are interwoven in the most of Shakspeare's pieces where romantic fables or historical events are made the subject of a noble and elevating exhibition. A determinate parody of the serious part is frequently not to be mistaken in them; at other times the connexion is more loose and arbitrary, and the more wonderful the invention of the whole, the more easily it becomes merely a light delusion of the fancy. The comic interruptions every where serve to prevent the play from being converted into an employment, to preserve the mind in the possession of its hilarity, and to keep off that gloomy and inert seriousness which so easily steals into the sentimental, but not tragical, drama. Most assuredly Shakspeare did not wish in this to comply with the taste of the multitude contrary to his own better judgment: for in various pieces, and in considerable parts of others, especially when the catastrophe approaches, and the minds are consequently more on the stretch and no longer susceptible of any entertainment serving to divert their attention, he has abstained from all comic intermixtures. It was also an object with him, that the clowns or buffoons should not occupy a more important place than that which he had assigned them: he expressly con-

demns the extemporizing with which they loved to enlarge their parts.\* Johnson founds the justification of the species of drama in which seriousness and mirth are mixed, on this, that in real life the vulgar is found close to the sublime, that the merry and the sad usually accompany and succeed one another. But it does not follow that because both are found together, they must not therefore be separated in the compositions of art. The observation is in other respects just, and this circumstance invests the poet with a power to proceed in that manner, because every thing in the drama must be regulated by the conditions of theatrical probability ; but the mixture of such dissimilar, and apparently contradictory, ingredients, in the same works, can only be justifiable on principles reconcileable with the views of art, which I have already described. In the dramas of Shakspeare the comic scenes are the antichamber of the poetry, where the servants remain ; these prosaical associates must not give such an extension to their voice as to deafen the speakers in the hall itself ; however, in those intervals when the ideal society has retired they deserve to be listened to ; the boldness of their raillery, the pretension of their imitations, may afford us many a conclusion respecting the relations of their masters.

Shakspeare's comic talent is equally wonderful with that which he has shown in the pathetic and tragic : it stands on an equal elevation, and possesses equal extent and profundity ; all that I before wished was, not to admit that the former prepon-

\* In Hamlet's directions to the players.

derated. He is highly inventive in comic situations and motives: it will be hardly possible to show whence he has taken any of them; whereas in the serious part of his dramas he has generally laid hold of something already known. His comic characterisation is equally true, various, and profound, with his serious. So little is he disposed to caricature, that we may rather say many of his traits are almost too nice and delicate for the stage, that they can only be properly seized by a great actor, and fully understood by a very acute audience. Not only has he delineated many kinds of folly, he has also contrived to exhibit mere stupidity in a most diverting and entertaining manner. There is also a peculiar species of the farcical to be found in his pieces, which seems to us to be introduced in a more arbitrary manner, but which, however, is founded in imitation of an actual custom. This is the introduction of the buffoon; the fool with his cap and motley dress, called in English, *Clown*, who appears in several comedies though not in all, (but in *Lear* alone of the tragedies,) and who generally exercises his wit merely in conversation with the principal persons, though he is also sometimes incorporated with the action. In those times it was not only usual for princes to keep court fools, but in many distinguished families they retained, along with other servants, such an exhilarating house-mate as a good antidote against the insipidity and wearisomeness of ordinary life, as a welcome interruption of established formalities. Great men, and even churchmen, did not consider it beneath their



dignity to recruit and solace themselves after important concerns with the conversation of their fools; the celebrated Sir Thomas More had his fool painted along with himself by Holbein. Shakspeare appears to have lived immediately before the time when the custom began to be abolished; in the English comic authors who succeeded him the clown is no longer to be found. The dismissal of the fool has been extolled as a proof of refinement; and our honest forefathers have been pitied for taking delight in such a coarse and farcical entertainment. I am much rather however disposed to believe, that the practice was dropped from the difficulty in finding fools able to do full justice to their parts : \*

\* See Hamlet's praise of Yorick.—In *The Twelfth Night*, Viola says :—

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool ;  
 And to do that well craves a kind of wit ;  
 He must observe their mood on whom he jests,  
 The quality of the persons, and the time ;  
 And like the haggard, check at every feather  
 That comes before his eye. This is a practice  
 As full of labour as a wise man's art :  
 For folly that he wisely shows is fit,  
 But wise men's folly fall'n quite taints their wit.

AUTHOR.

The passages from Shakspeare, in the original work, are given from the author's masterly translation. We may be allowed however to observe, that the last line,

“ Doch wozu ist des Weisen Thorheit nutz ? ”

literally, *Of what use is the folly of the wise ?* does not convey the exact meaning of Shakspeare.—TRANS.

on the other hand, reason, with all its conceit of itself, has become too timid to tolerate such bold irony; it is always careful lest the mantle of its gravity should be disturbed in any of its folds; and rather than allow a privileged place to folly beside itself, it has unconsciously assumed the part of the ridiculous; but, alas! a heavy and cheerless ridicule.\* It would be easy to make a collection of the excellent sallies and biting sarcasms which have been preserved of celebrated court fools. It is well known that they frequently told such truths to princes as are never now told to them.† Shakespeare's fools, along with somewhat of an overstraining for wit, which cannot altogether be avoided when wit becomes a separate profession, have for the most part an incomparable humour, and an infinite abundance of intellect, enough to supply a whole host of ordinary wise men.

I have still a few observations to make on the diction and versification of our poet. The language is here and there somewhat obsolete, but on the whole much less so than the most of the writers of that day, a sufficient proof of the goodness of his

\* "Since the little wit that fools have was silenced, the little foolery that wise men have makes a greater show."—*As you Like it*, Act i. Scene 2.

† Charles the Bold, of Brugundy, is known to have frequently boasted that he wished to rival Hannibal as the greatest general of all ages. After his defeat at Granson his fool accompanied him in his hurried flight, and exclaimed, "Ah, your Grace, they have for once Hanniballed us!" If the Duke had given an ear to this warning raillery, he would not so soon afterwards have come to a disgraceful end.

choice. Prose had yet been but little cultivated, as the learned generally wrote in Latin : a favourable circumstance for the dramatic poet ; for what has he to do with the scientific language of books ? He had not only read, but studied the earlier English poets ; but he drew his language immediately from life, and he possessed a masterly skill in blending the dialogical element with the highest poetical elevation. I know not what certain critics mean, when they say that Shakspeare is frequently ungrammatical. To make out this affirmation, they must prove that similar constructions never occur in his contemporaries, the direct contrary of which can be established. In no language is every thing determined on principle, much is always left to the caprice of custom ; and because this has since changed, do they wish to make the poet answerable for it ? The English language had not then attained that correct insipidity which has been introduced into the more recent literature of the country, to the prejudice, perhaps, of its originality. As a field when first brought under the plough produces, along with the fertile shoots, many luxuriant weeds, we shall also find that the poetical diction of that day run occasionally out into extravagance, but an extravagance originating in the fulness of its strength. We may still perceive traces of a want of assistance, but no where of a laborious and spiritless display of art. In general Shakspeare's style yet remains the very best model, both in the vigorous and sublime, and the pleasing and tender. In his sphere he has exhausted all the means of language.

On all, the stamp of his mighty spirit is impressed. His images and figures, in their unsought for, nay; unarbitrary singularity, have often a sweetness altogether peculiar. He becomes occasionally obscure from too great fondness for the most compressed brevity; but the poring over Shakspeare's lines affords us an ample requital for our labour.

The verse of all his plays is generally the rhymeless Iambic of ten or eleven syllables, occasionally only intermixed with rhymes, but more frequently alternating with prose. No one piece is wholly written in prose; for even in those which approach the most to the pure comedy, there is always something added which elevates them to a higher rank than belongs to this species. Many scenes are wholly prosaical, in others discourses in verse and prose succeed each other alternately. This can only appear an impropriety in the eyes of those who are accustomed to consider the lines of a drama like so many soldiers drawn up rank and file on a parade, with the same uniform, arms, and accoutrements, so that when we see one or two we may represent to ourselves thousands as being every way like them.

In the use of verse and prose Shakspeare observes very nice distinctions according to the ranks of the speakers, but still more according to their characters and disposition of mind. A noble language, elevated above the usual tone, is only suitable to a certain decorum of manners, which is thrown over both vices and virtues, and which does not even wholly disappear amidst the violence of passion.



If this is not exclusively possessed by the higher ranks, it still however belongs naturally more to them than to the lower ; and therefore in Shakspeare dignity and familiarity of language, poetry, and prose, are in this manner distributed among the characters. Hence his tradesmen, peasants, soldiers, sailors, servants, but more especially his fools and clowns, speak almost, without exception, in the tone of their actual life. However, inward dignity of sentiment, wherever it is possessed, does not stand in need of the artificial elegancies of education and custom to display itself in a noble manner ; it is a universal right of mankind, of the highest as well as the lowest ; and hence also, in Shakspeare, the nobility of nature and morality is elevated above that of society. He not unfrequently also makes the very same persons express themselves at times in the most sublime language, and at others in the lowest ; and this inequality is in like manner founded in truth. Extraordinary situations, which intensely occupy the head and throw mighty passions into play, give elevation and tension to the soul : it collects together all its powers, and exhibits an unusual energy, both in its operations and in its communications by language. On the other hand, even the greatest men have their moments of remissness, when to a certain degree they forget the dignity of their character in the most unreserved carelessness. This very tone of mind is necessary to admit of their receiving amusement from the jokes of others, or passing jokes themselves, which surely cannot reflect dishonour even on a hero. Let

any person, for example, go carefully through the part of Hamlet. How bold and powerful the language of his poetry when he conjures the ghost of his father, when he spurs himself on to the bloody deed, when he thunders into the soul of his mother ! How he lowers his tone down to that of common life, when he has to do with persons whose station demands from him such a line of conduct ; when he makes game of Polonius and the courtiers, instructs the player, and even enters into the jokes of the grave-digger. Of all the principal characters of the poet of a serious description there is no one so rich in wit and humour as Hamlet ; hence, of all of them he makes the greatest use of the familiar style. Others do not fall into it ; either because they are constantly surrounded by the pomp of rank, or because a uniform seriousness is natural to them ; or, in short, because they are throughout the whole piece under the dominion of a passion calculated to excite and not depress the mind like the sorrow of Hamlet. The choice of the one form or the other is every where so suitable, and so much founded in the nature of the thing, that I will venture to assert, even where the poet in the very same speech makes the speaker leave prose for poetry, or the converse, this could not be altered without the danger of injuring or destroying something or other. The blank verse has this advantage, that its tone may be elevated or lowered ; it admits of approximation to the familiar style of conversation, and never forms such an abrupt contrast as that, for example, between plain prose and rhymed Alexandrines.

Shakspeare's Iambics are sometimes highly harmonious and full sounding ; always varied and suitable to the subject, at one time they are distinguished for ease and rapidity, at another they move along with ponderous energy. They never fall out of the dialogical character, which may always be traced even in the continued discourses of individuals, excepting when they run into the lyrical. They are a complete model of the dramatic use of this species of verse, which, in English, since Milton, has been also used in epic poetry ; but in the latter it has assumed a quite different turn. Even the irregularities of Shakspeare's versification are expressive ; a broken off verse, or a sudden change of rhythmus, is in unison with the pause in the progress of the thought, or the entrance of another disposition of mind. As a proof that he purposely violated the mechanical rules, in the conviction that too symmetrical a versification does not suit with the drama, and has in the long run a tendency on the stage to lull the spectators asleep, we may observe that his earlier pieces are those which he has most diligently versified, and that in the works of a later period, when through practice he must have acquired a greater facility, we find the strongest deviations from the regulated progress of the verse. He was merely enabled by the verse to render the poetical elevation audible, but he claimed in it the utmost possible freedom.

The views or suggestions of feeling by which he was guided in the use of rhyme may be traced with almost equal certainty. Not unfrequently scenes, or even single speeches, close with a few

rhymed lines, for the purpose of more strongly marking the division and of giving it more rounding. This was imitated in an injudicious manner by the English tragic poets of a later period; they suddenly elevated the tone in the rhymed lines, as if the person began all at once to speak in another language. The practice was hailed by the actors from its serving as a signal for clapping when they made their exit. In Shakspeare again the transitions are more easy: all changes of forms are introduced imperceptibly, and as if of themselves. Moreover, he generally loves to elevate a series of ingenious and antithetical sayings by the use of rhyme. We find other passages in continued rhyme, where solemnity and theatrical pomp were suitable, as in the mask,\* as it is called, in the *Tempest*, and in the play introduced into Hamlet. In other pieces, for instance the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the rhyme constitutes a considerable part; because he wished to give them a glowing colour, or because the characters utter in a musical tone their love complaints or love suits. Here he has even introduced rhymed strophes, which approach to the form of the sonnet then usual in England. The assertion of Malone that Shakspeare in his youth was fond of rhyme, but that he afterwards rejected it, is sufficiently refuted by his own chronology of the poet's works. In some of the earliest, for instance in the Second and Third Part of *Henry the Sixth*, there are hardly any

\* I shall take the opportunity of saying a few words respecting this species of drama when I come to speak of Ben Jonson.



rhymes; in what is stated to be his last piece, *The Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, and in *Macbeth*, which is proved to have been composed under the reign of King James, we find them in no inconsiderable number. Even in the secondary matters of form Shakspeare was not guided by humour and accident, but acted like a genuine artist on solid grounds. This might also be shown in the kinds of verse which he least often used; for instance, in the rhymed verses of seven and eight syllables, were we not afraid of dwelling too long on merely technical peculiarities.

The manner of handling rhymed verse, and the opinion respecting its harmony and elegance, have undergone a much greater change in England in the course of two centuries than has been the case in the rhymeless Iambic or blank verse. In the former, Dryden and Pope have become models; these writers have communicated the utmost smoothing to rhyme, but they have also tied it down to a harmonious uniformity. A foreigner, to whom antiquated and new are the same, may perhaps feel with greater freedom the advantages of the more ancient manner. Certain it is, the rhyme of the present day, from the too great confinement of the couplet, is unfit for the drama. We must not estimate the rhyme of Shakspeare by the mode of subsequent times, but by a comparison with his contemporaries or with Spenser. The comparison will without doubt turn out to his advantage. Spencer is often diffuse; Shakspeare, though sometimes hard, is always brief and vigorous. He has

much more frequently been induced by the rhyme to leave out something necessary than to insert any thing superfluous. Many of his rhymes however are yet faultless: ingenious with attractive ease, and rich without false brilliancy. The songs interspersed (namely, those of the poet himself) are generally sweetly playful and altogether musical; we hear in imagination their melody while we merely read them.

The whole of Shakspeare's productions bear the certain stamp of his original genius, but yet no writer was ever farther removed from every thing like a manner acquired from habit and personal peculiarities. He is rather, from the diversity of tone and colour, which he assumes according to the qualities of objects, a true Proteus. Each of his compositions is like a world of itself, which moves in its own sphere. They are works of art, finished in the most consummate style, in which the freedom and judicious choice of their author are revealed. If the thorough formation of a work, even in its minutest parts, according to a leading idea; if the dominion of the animating spirit over all the means of execution deserves the name of correctness (and this, excepting in matters of grammar, is the only proper sense of the word); we shall then, after allowing to Shakspeare all the higher qualities which demand our admiration, be also compelled, in most cases, to allow him the name of a correct poet.

It would be instructive in the highest degree, could we follow, step by step in his career, an

author who at once founded and carried his art to perfection, and to go through his works in the order of time. But, with the exception of a few fixed points, which at length have been obtained, we are here in want of the necessary materials. The diligent Malone has indeed made an attempt to arrange the plays of Shakspeare in chronological order; but he himself only gives it out for hypothetical, and it could not possibly be attended with complete success, as he excludes from his research a considerable number of pieces which have been ascribed to the poet, though rejected as spurious by all the editors since Rowe, but which, in my opinion, must, if not wholly, at least in a great measure be attributed to him.\*

The best and easiest mode therefore of reviewing the dramas will be to arrange them in classes. This, it must be owned, is merely a last shift: several critics have declared that all Shakspeare's pieces substantially belong to the same species, although

\* Were this book destined immediately for an English public, I should not have hazarded an opinion like this at variance with that which is generally received, without supporting it by proofs. The investigation however is too extensive, and I have therefore reserved it for a separate treatise. Besides at the present moment, while I am putting the last hand to my lectures, no collection of English books but my own is accessible to me. I should have completed it to answer this object, if the interruption of intercourse with England did not render it impossible to procure any other than the most common English books. On this point therefore I must request indulgence. In an appendix to this lecture I shall merely state a few observations in a cursory manner.

sometimes one ingredient, sometimes another, the musical or the characteristical, the invention of the wonderful or the imitation of the real, the pathetic or the comic, seriousness or irony, may preponderate in the mixture. Shakspeare himself, it would appear, only laughed at the petty endeavours of many critics to find out divisions and subdivisions of species, and to hedge in what had been so separated with the most anxious care; the pedantic Polonius in *Hamlet* recommends the players, for their knowledge of "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical, historical-pastoral, scene-undividable, or poem unlimited." On another occasion he ridicules the limitation of tragedy to an unfortunate catastrophe:

"And tragical, my noble lord, it is;  
For Pyramus therein doth kill himself."

However the division into comedies, tragedies, and historical dramas, according to the usual practice, may in some measure be adopted, if we do not lose sight of the transitions and affinities. The subjects of the comedies are generally taken from novels: they are romantic love tales; none are altogether confined to the sphere of common or domestic relations: all of them possess poetical ornament, some of them run into the wonderful or the pathetic. To these two of his most distinguished tragedies are immediately linked, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*; both true novels, and composed on the same principles. In many of the historical plays a consider-



able space is occupied by the comic characters and scenes; others are serious throughout, and leave behind a tragical impression. The essential circumstance by which they are distinguished is, that the plot bears a reference to a poetical and national interest. This is not so much the case in *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*; and hence we do not include these tragedies among the historical pieces, though the first is founded on an old northern, the second on a national tradition; and the third comes even within the epoch of the Scottish history, after it ceased to be fabulous.

Among the comedies, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Comedy of Errors*, bear many traces of an early origin. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* paints the irresolution of love, and its infidelity towards friendship, in a pleasant, but in some degree superficial manner, we might almost say with the levity of mind which a passion suddenly entertained, and as suddenly given up, presupposes. The faithless lover is at last forgiven without much difficulty by his first mistress, on account of his ambiguous repentance; for the more serious part, the premeditated flight of the daughter of a Prince, the captivity of her father along with herself by a band of robbers, of which one of the two gentlemen, the faithless and banished friend, has been compulsively elected captain: for all this a peaceful solution is soon found. It is as if the course of the world was obliged to accommodate itself to a transient youthful caprice, called love. Julia, who accompanies her faithless lover

in the disguise of a page, is, as it were, a light sketch of the tender female figures of a Viola and an Imogen, who, in the latter pieces of Shakspeare, leave their home in similar disguises on love adventures, and to whom a peculiar charm is communicated by the exhibition of the most virgin modesty in their hazardous and problematical situation.

*The Comedy of Errors* is the subject of the *Menechmæ* of Plautus, entirely recast and enriched with new developements: of all the works of Shakspeare this is the only example of imitation of, or borrowing from, the ancients. To the two twin brothers of the same name are added two slaves, also twins, impossible to be distinguished from each other, and of the same name. The improbability is by this means double: but when once we have lent ourselves to the first, which certainly borders on the incredible, we shall not probably be disposed to cavil about the second; and if the spectator is to be entertained by mere perplexities they cannot be too much varied. In such pieces we must always pre-suppose, to give an appearance of truth to the senses at least, that the parts by which the misunderstandings are occasioned are played with masks, and this the poet no doubt observed. I cannot acquiesce in the censure that the discovery is too long deferred: so long as novelty and interest are possessed by the perplexing incidents we need not be in dread of wearisomeness. And this is here really the case: matters are carried so far that one of the two brothers is first arrested for debt, then confined as a lunatic, and the other is forced to take

refuge in a sanctuary to save his life. In a subject of this description it is impossible to steer clear of all sorts of low circumstances, abusive language, and blows; Shakspeare has however endeavoured to ennoble it in every possible way. A couple of scenes, dedicated to jealousy and love, interrupt the course of perplexities which are merely occasioned by the external sense. A greater solemnity is given to the discovery, from the prince presiding, and from the re-union of the long separated parents of the twins who are still in life. The exposition, by which the spectator must be previously instructed while the characters in the play are still involved in ignorance, and which Plautus artlessly conveys in a prologue, is here masterly introduced in an affecting relation of the father. In short, this is perhaps the best of all written or possible *Menechmæ*; and if the piece is inferior in worth to other pieces of Shakspeare, it is merely because nothing more could be made of the materials.

*The Taming of the Shrew* has the air of an Italian comedy; and indeed the love intrigue, which constitutes the main part of it, is derived mediately or immediately from a piece of Ariosto. The characters and passions are lightly sketched; the intrigue is introduced without much preparation, and in its rapid progress impeded by no sort of difficulties; however, in the manner in which Petruchio, though previously cautioned respecting Catharine, still runs the risk of marrying her, and contrives to tame her, the character and peculiar humour of the English are visible. The colours are laid somewhat coarsely

on, but the ground is good. That the obstinacy of a young and untamed girl, possessed of none of the attractions of her sex, and neither supported by bodily nor mental strength, must soon yield to the still rougher and more capricious but assumed self-will of a man : such a lesson can only be taught on the stage with all the perspicuity of a proverb.

The prelude is still more remarkable than the play itself: the drunken tinker removed in his sleep to a palace, where he is deceived into the belief of being a nobleman. The invention, however, is not Shakspeare's. Holberg has handled the same subject in a masterly manner, and with inimitable truth; but he has spun it out to five acts, for which the matter is hardly sufficient. He probably did not borrow from the English dramatist, but like him took the hint from a popular story. There are several comic motives of this description, which go back to a very remote age, without ever becoming antiquated.—Shakspeare proves himself here, as well as every where else, a great poet: the whole is merely a light sketch, but in elegance and nice propriety it will hardly ever be excelled. Neither has he overlooked the irony which the subject naturally suggested to him, that the great lord who is driven by idleness and *ennui* to deceive a poor drunkard, can make no better use of his situation than the latter, who every moment relapses into his vulgar habits. The last half of this prelude, that in which the tinker in his new state again drinks himself out of his senses, and is transformed in his sleep into his former condition, from some accident or other is lost. It ought to



have followed at the end of the larger piece. The occasional observations of the tinker, during the course of the representation of the comedy, might have been improvisatory; but it is hardly credible that Shakspeare should have trusted to the momentary suggestions of the players, which he did not hold in high estimation, the conclusion of a work, however short, which he had so carefully commenced. Moreover, the only circumstance which connects the prelude with the play is, that it belongs to the new life of the supposed nobleman to have plays acted in his castle by strolling actors. This invention of introducing spectators on the stage, who contribute to the entertainment, has been very wittily used by later English poets.

*Love's Labour Lost* is also numbered among the pieces of his youth. It is a humorsome display of frolic; a whole cornucopia of the most vivacious jokes is poured out into it. Youth is certainly perceivable in the lavish superfluity displayed in the execution: the uninterrupted succession of plays on words, and sallies of every description, hardly leave the spectator time to breathe; the sparks of wit fly about in such profusion, that they form complete fireworks, and the dialogue, for the most part, resembles the hurried manner in which the passing masks at a carnival attempt to banter each other. A young king of Navarre with three of his courtiers, has made a vow to pass three years in rigid retirement, employed in the study of wisdom; for that purpose he has banished all female society from court, and imposed a penalty on the intercourse

with women. But scarcely has he announced this determination in a pompous discourse worthy of the most heroic achievements, when the daughter of the King of France appears at his court, in the name of her old and bed-ridden father, to demand back a province which he held in pledge. He is compelled to give her audience, falls immediately in love with her; and things do not succeed better with his companions, who on their parts renew their old acquaintance with the attendants of the princess. Each is already in his heart disposed to violate his vow, without knowing the wishes of his associates; they overhear one another, as they in turn confide their pains in a poem to the solitary forest; every one jeers and confounds the one who follows him. Biron, who from the beginning was the most satirical among them, at last steps forth, and rallies the king and the two others, till the discovery of a love-letter reduces even him to hang down his head. He extricates himself and his companions from their dilemma, by ridiculing the folly of the vow which they have broken, and after a noble eulogy on women, by inviting them to swear allegiance to the colours of love. This scene is incomparably well planned, and the summit of the whole. The manner in which they afterwards prosecute their love-suits in disguise, and in which they are tricked, and laughed at by the ladies, who also assume disguises, is spun out perhaps to too great a length. It may be thought too that the poet, when he suddenly announces the death of the King of France, and makes the Princess postpone

the answer to the serious advances of the young Prince till the expiration of the period of her mourning, and impose besides a penance on him for his levity, falls out of the proper comic tone. But from the raillery which prevails throughout the whole piece, it was hardly possible to bring about a more satisfactory conclusion: the characters could only return to sobriety after their extravagance, by means of some foreign influence. The grotesque figures which between hands contribute to the entertainment, a pompous fantastical Spaniard, Don Armado, a couple of pedants, and a clown, are creatures of a whimsical imagination, well adapted as foils for the wit of a vivacious society.

*All's Well that Ends Well*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, bear in so far a resemblance to each other, that along with the main plot, which turns on important relations decisive of the happiness or misery of life, and which is calculated to make a powerful impression on the moral feeling, the poet has with artful dexterity contrived to introduce a number of admixtures of an exhilarating description. It is not as if the poet was unwilling to allow full scope to the serious impressions: he merely adds a due counterpoise to them in the entertainment which he supplies for the imagination and the understanding. He furnishes the story with all the separate features which give to it the appearance of a real, though extraordinary, event. But he never falls into the lachrymose tone of the sentimental drama, nor into the bitterness of those

dramas which have a moral direction, and which are really nothing but moral invectives, and pasquinades, in the shape of dialogue. Compassion, anxiety, and discontent, become too oppressive when they are too long dwelt on, and when the whole of a work is exclusively limited to them. Shakspeare always transports us from the confinement of social institutions, or pretensions by which men intercept light and air from each other, into open space, before we ourselves even become conscious of our want.

*All's Well that Ends Well* is the old story of a young maiden whose love soared much beyond her station. She obtains her lover in marriage from the hand of the King as a reward for curing him, by means of a hereditary arcanum of her father, a celebrated physician, from a hopeless and lingering disease. The young man treats her modesty and beauty with indignity; consummates the marriage only in appearance, and seeks security in the dangers of war, from a domestic happiness which wounds his pride. By faithful perseverance and innocence of behaviour, she fulfils the apparently impossible conditions on which the Count promised to acknowledge her as his wife. Love appears here in humble guise: it strives on the female side to overcome the prejudices of birth without being strengthened by the support of mutual inclination. But as soon as Helena is connected with the Count by a sacred bond, though by him considered as an oppressive chain, her error becomes her virtue.—She affects us by her patient suffering: the moment



in which she appears to most advantage is when she accuses herself as the persecutor of her inflexible husband, and, under the pretext of a pilgrimage to atone for her error, privately leaves the house of her mother-in-law. Johnson expresses a cordial aversion to Count Bertram, and regrets that he should be allowed to come off at last with no other punishment than a temporary shame, nay, even be rewarded with the unmerited possession of a virtuous wife. But did Shakspeare ever attempt to mitigate the impression of his unfeeling pride and giddy dissipation? He intended merely to give us a military portrait. And does not the poet paint the true way of the world, according to which the injustice of men towards women is not considered in a very serious light, if they can only maintain what is called the honour of their family? Bertram's sole justification is, that the King, in a matter of such delicacy and private right as the choice of a wife, thought proper to constrain him by the exercise of arbitrary power. Besides, this story, as well as that of Griselda and many of a similar description, is intended to prove that female truth and resignation will at last overcome the violence of men; other novels and *fabliaux* again are true satires on the inconstancy and cunning of women. In this piece age is exhibited to singular advantage: the plain honesty of the King, the good-natured impetuosity of old Lafcu, the maternal indulgence of the Countess to Helena's love of her son, seem all as it were to vie with each other in endeavours to conquer the arrogance of the young Count. The style of the

whole is more conspicuous for sententiousness than imagery: the glowing colours of fancy could not with propriety have been introduced into such a subject. In the passages where the humiliating abandonment of the poor Helena becomes most painful, the cowardly Parolles steps in to the relief of the spectator. The stratagems by which his pretended valour and his impudent defamation are unmasked are among the most comic scenes which ever were invented: they contain matter enough for an excellent comedy, if Shakspeare were not always rich even to profusion. Falstaff has thrown Parolles into the shade, otherwise he would have been more celebrated among the comic characters of the poet.

The main plot in *Much Ado about Nothing* is the same with the story of *Ariodante* and *Ginevra* in Ariosto; the secondary circumstances and development are no doubt very different. The manner in which the innocent Hero when before the altar at the moment of her marriage, in the presence of her family and many witnesses, is brought to shame by accusations of the most contumelious nature, yet clothed with a great appearance of truth, is a grand piece of theatrical effect in the genuine and justifiable sense. The impression would have been too tragical if Shakspeare had not purposely softened it with the view of preparing a fortunate catastrophe. The discovery of the plot against Hero has been already partly made, though not by the persons interested; and the poet has contrived to convert the arrest and the examination of the guilty individuals into scenes of the most entertaining descrip-

tion, by means of the blundering simplicity of a couple of constables and watchmen. There is a second piece of theatrical effect not inferior to the first, where Claudio, misled by his error, in the intention of giving his hand to a relation of his bride, whom he supposes to be dead, on unveiling her discovers Hero herself. The uncommon success of this play in Shakspeare's own time, and even since in England, is more particularly to be attributed however to the parts of Benedict and Beatrice, two humorsome beings, who incessantly attack each other with all the resources of raillery. Declared rebels to love, they are both entangled in its net by a plot of their friends to make them believe that they are the object of the secret passion of each other. Some one, without any great share of penetration, objected to the making twice use of the same artifice in entrapping them; the drollery, however, lies in the very symmetry of the deception. Their friends attribute the whole effect to themselves; but the exclusive direction of their raillery against each other is in itself a proof of a growing inclination. Their witty vivacity does not even abandon them during the declaration of love; and their behaviour only assumes a serious appearance for the purpose of defending the slandered Hero. This is exceedingly well imagined; the lovers of jesting must fix a point beyond which they are not to indulge in their propensity, if they would not be mistaken for buffoons by trade.

- In *Measure for Measure* Shakspeare was compelled, by the nature of the subject, to make his

poetry more familiar with criminal justice than is usual with him. All kinds of proceedings connected with the subject, all sorts of active or passive persons, pass in review before us : the hypocritical Lord Deputy, the compassionate Provost, and the hard-hearted Hangman ; a young man of quality who is to suffer for the seduction of his mistress before marriage, loose wretches brought in by the police, nay, even a hardened criminal whom the preparations for his execution cannot awake out of his callousness. But yet, notwithstanding this convincing truth, how tenderly and mildly the whole is treated ! The piece takes improperly its name from the punishment : the sense of the whole is properly the triumph of mercy over strict justice ; no man being himself so secure from errors as to be entitled to deal it out among his equals. The most beautiful ornament of the composition is the character of Isabella, who, in the intention of taking the veil, allows herself to be prevailed on by pious love again to tread the perplexing ways of the world, while the heavenly purity of her mind is not even stained with one unholy thought by the general corruption : in the humble robes of the novice of a nunnery she is a true angel of light. When the cold and hitherto unsullied Angelo, whom the Duke has commissioned to restrain the excesses of dissolute immorality by a rigid administration of the laws during his pretended absence, is even himself tempted by the virgin charms of Isabella as she supplicates for her brother Claudio, doomed to death for a youthful error ; when he first insinuates in timid



and obscure language, but at last impudently declares his readiness to grant the life of Claudio for the sacrifice of her honour; when Isabella repulses him with a noble contempt; when she relates what has happened to her brother, and the latter at first applauds her, but at length, overpowered by the dread of death, wishes to persuade her to consent to her dishonor:—in these masterly scenes Shakspeare has sounded the depth of the human heart. The interest here reposes altogether on the action, curiosity constitutes no part of our delight; for the Duke, in the disguise of a Monk, is always present to watch over his dangerous representatives, and to avert every evil which could possibly be apprehended: we look here with confidence to the solemn decision. The Duke acts the part of the Monk naturally even to deception; he unites in his person the wisdom of the priest and the prince. His wisdom is merely too fond of round-about ways; his vanity is flattered with acting invisibly like an earthly providence; he is more entertained with overhearing his subjects than governing them in the customary manner. As he at last extends pardon to all the guilty, we do not see how his original purpose of restoring the strictness of the laws by committing the execution of them to other hands has been in any wise accomplished. The poet might have had this irony in view, that of the numberless slanders of the Duke, told him by the petulant Lucio without knowing the person to whom he spoke, what regarded his singularities and whims was not wholly without foundation. It is deserving of

remark that Shakspeare amidst the rancour of religious parties, takes a delight in painting the condition of a monk, and always represents his influence as beneficial. We find in him none of the black and knavish monks, which an enthusiasm for the protestant religion, rather than poetical inspiration, has suggested to some of our modern poets. Shakspeare merely gives his monks an inclination to busy themselves in the affairs of others, after renouncing the world for themselves; with respect however to pious frauds he does not represent them as very conscientious. Such are the parts acted by the monk in *Romeo and Juliet*, and another in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and even by the Duke, whom, contrary to the well known proverb, the cowl seems really to make a monk.

The *Merchant of Venice* is one of Shakspeare's most perfect works: popular to an extraordinary degree, and calculated to produce the most powerful effect on the stage, and at the same time a wonder of ingenuity and art for the reflecting critic. Shylock, the Jew, is one of the inconceivable masterpieces of characterisation of which Shakspeare alone furnishes us with examples. It is easy for the poet and the player to exhibit a caricature of national sentiments, modes of speaking, and gestures. Shylock however is every thing but a common Jew: he possesses a very determinate and original individuality, and yet we perceive a light touch of Judaism in every thing which he says or does. We imagine we hear a sprinkling of the Jewish pronunciation in the mere written words, as we sometimes still find

it in the higher classes, notwithstanding their social refinement. In tranquil situations what is foreign to the European blood and Christian sentiments is less perceivable, but in passion the national stamp appears more strongly marked. All these inimitable niceties the finished art of a great actor can alone properly express. Shylock is a man of information, even a thinker in his own way; he has only not discovered the region where human feelings dwell: his morality is founded on the disbelief in goodness and magnanimity. The desire of revenging the oppressions and humiliations suffered by his nation is, after avarice, his principal spring of action. His hate is naturally directed chiefly against those Christians who possess truly Christian sentiments: the example of disinterested love of our neighbour seems to him the most unrelenting persecution of the Jews. The letter of the law is his idol; he refuses to lend an ear to the voice of mercy, which speaks to him from the mouth of Portia with heavenly eloquence: he insists on severe and inflexible justice, and it at last recoils on his own head. Here he becomes a symbol of the general history of his unfortunate nation. The melancholy and self-neglectful magnanimity of Antonio is affectingly sublime. Like a royal merchant, he is surrounded with a whole train of noble friends. The contrast which this forms to the selfish cruelty of the usurer Shylock, was necessary to redeem the honour of human nature. The danger which hangs over Antonio till towards the conclusion of the fourth act, and which the imagination is almost

afraid to approach, would fill us with too painful an anxiety, if the poet did not also provide for our entertainment and dissipation. This is particularly effected by the scenes at the country seat of Portia, which transport the spectator into quite another sphere. And yet they are closely connected, by the concatenation of causes and effects, with the main business: the preparations of Bassanio for his courtship are the cause of Antonio's subscribing the dangerous bond; and Portia again, by means of the advice of her uncle, a celebrated counsel, effects the safety of the friend of her lover. But the relations of the dramatic composition are still here admirably observed in another manner. The trial between Shylock and Antonio, though it proceeds like a real event, still remains an unheard of and particular case. Shakspeare has consequently associated with it a love intrigue not less extraordinary: the one becomes natural and probable by means of the other. A rich, beautiful, and clever heiress, who can only be won by the solving of a riddle; the locked caskets; the foreign princes, who come to try the adventure: with all this wonderful splendour the imagination is powerfully excited. The two scenes in which the Prince of Morocco, in the language of Eastern hyperbole, and the self-conceited Prince of Arragon, make their choice among the caskets, merely raise our curiosity, and give employment to our wits; in the third, where the two lovers stand trembling before the inevitable choice, which in one moment must unite or separate them for ever, Shakspeare has lavished all the seductions of feeling,



all the magic of poetry. We share in the rapture of Portia and Bassanio at the fortunate choice: we easily conceive why they are fond of each other, for they are both most deserving of love. The judgment scene, with which the fourth act is occupied, is alone a perfect drama, concentrating in itself the interest of the whole. The knot is now untied, and according to the common ideas of theatrical satisfaction, the curtain might drop. But the poet was unwilling to dismiss his audience with the gloomy impressions which the delivery of Antonio, accomplished with so much difficulty, contrary to all expectation, and the punishment of Shylock, were calculated to leave behind: he has therefore added the fifth act by way of a musical afterpiece in the piece itself. The episode of Jessica, the fugitive daughter of the Jew, in whom Shakspeare has contrived to throw a disguise of sweetness over the national features, and the artifice by which Portia and her companion are enabled to rally their newly married husbands, supply him with the materials. The scene opens with the playful prattling of two lovers in a summer evening; it is followed by soft music and a rapturous eulogy on this powerful disposer of the human mind and the world; the principal characters then make their appearance, and after an assumed dissension, which is elegantly carried on, the whole ends with the most exhilarating mirth.

*As you Like It* is a piece of an entirely different description. It would be difficult to bring the contents within the compass of an ordinary relation:

nothing takes place, or rather what does take place is not so essential as what is said; even what may be called the denouement is brought about in a pretty arbitrary manner. Whoever perceives nothing but what is capable of demonstration will hardly be disposed to allow that it has any plan at all. Banishment and flight have assembled together, in the forest of Arden, a singular society: a Duke dethroned by his brother, and, with his faithful companions in misfortune, living in the wilds on the produce of the chase; two disguised princesses, who love each other with a sisterly affection; a witty court fool; lastly, the native inhabitants of the forest, ideal and natural shepherds and shepherdesses. These lightly sketched figures pass along in the most diversified succession; we see always the shady dark-green landscape in the background, and breathe in imagination the fresh air of the forest. The hours are here measured by no clocks, no regulated recurrence of duty or toil: they flow on unnumbered in voluntary occupation or fanciful idleness, to which every one addicts himself according to his humour or disposition, and this unlimited freedom compensates all of them for the lost conveniences of life. One throws himself down solitarily under a tree, and indulges in melancholy reflections on the changes of fortune, the falsehood of the world, and the self-created torments of social life; others make the woods resound with social and festive songs, to the accompaniment of their horns. Selfishness, envy, and ambition, have been left in the city behind them; of all the human

passions love alone has found an entrance into this wilderness, where it dictates the same language to the simple shepherd and the chivalrous youth, who hangs his love-ditty to a tree. A prudish shepherdess falls instantaneously in love with Rosalind, disguised in men's apparel; the latter sharply reproaches her with her severity to her poor lover, and the pain of refusal, which she at length feels from her own experience, disposes her to compassion and requital. The fool carries his philosophical contempt of external show, and his raillery of the illusion of love, so far, that he purposely seeks out the ugliest and simplest country wench for a mistress. Throughout the whole picture, it seems to have been the intention of the poet to show, that nothing is wanted to call forth the poetry which has its dwelling in nature and the human mind but to throw off all artificial constraint, and restore both to their native liberty. In the progress of the piece itself, the visionary carelessness of such an existence is expressed: it has even been alluded to by Shakspeare in the title. Whoever affects to be displeased, that in this romantic forest the ceremonial of dramatic art is not duly observed, ought in justice to be delivered over to the wise fool, for the purpose of being kindly conducted out of it to some prosaical region.

*The Twelfth Night, or What you Will*, unites the entertainment of an intrigue, contrived with great ingenuity, to the richest fund of comic characters and situations, and the beauteous colours of an ethereal poetry. In most of his plays, Shaks-

peare treats love more as an affair of the imagination than the heart ; but here we are particularly reminded by him that, in his language, the same word, *fancy*, signified both fancy and love. The love of the music-enraptured Duke to Olivia is not merely a fancy, but an imagination ; Viola appears at first to fall arbitrarily in love with the Duke, whom she serves as a page, although she afterwards touches the tenderest strings of feeling ; the proud Olivia is entangled by the modest and insinuating messenger of the Duke, in whom she is far from suspecting a disguised rival, and at last, by a second deception, takes the brother for the sister. To these, which I might call ideal follies, a contrast is formed by the naked absurdities to which the entertaining tricks of the ludicrous persons of the piece give rise, in like manner under the pretence of love : the awkward courtship of a silly and profligate Knight to Olivia, and her declaration to Viola ; the imagination of the pedantical steward Malvolio, that his mistress is secretly in love with him, which carries him so far that he is at last shut up as a lunatic, and visited by the clown in the dress of a priest. These scenes are as admirably conceived and significant, as they are laughable. If this was really the last work of Shakspeare, as is affirmed, he must have enjoyed to the last the same youthfulness of mind, and have carried with him to the grave the whole fulness of his talents.

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, though properly a comedy in the usual acceptation of the word, we shall pass over at present, till we come to speak of



*Henry IV.*, that we may give our opinion of the character of Falstaff in connexion.

*The Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*, may be in so far compared together, that in both the influence of a wonderful world of spirits is interwoven with the turmoil of human passions and with the farcical adventures of folly. *The Midsummer Night's Dream* is certainly an earlier production ; but *The Tempest*, according to all appearance, was written in Shakspeare's later days : hence most critics, on the supposition that the poet must have continued to improve with increasing maturity of mind, have given the last piece a great preference over the former. I cannot, however, altogether agree with them in this : the internal worth of these two works, in my opinion, are pretty equally balanced, and a predilection for the one or the other can only be governed by personal taste. The superiority of *The Tempest*, in regard to profound and original characterisation, is obvious ; as a whole we must always admire the masterly skill which he has here displayed in the economy of his means, and the dexterity with which he has disguised his preparations, the scaffoldings for the wonderful aerial structure. In *The Midsummer Night's Dream* again there flows a luxuriant vein of the boldest and most fantastical invention ; the most extraordinary combination of the most dissimilar ingredients seems to have arisen without effort by some ingenious and lucky accident, and the colours are of such clear transparency that we think the whole of the variegated fabric may be blown away with a breath. The fairy world here

described resembles those elegant pieces of Arabesque, where little Genii, with butterfly wings, rise half embodied above the flower cups. Twilight, moonshine, dew, and spring-perfumes, are the element of these tender spirits; they assist nature in embroidering her carpet with green leaves, many-coloured flowers, and dazzling insects; in the human world they merely sport in a childish and wayward manner with their beneficent or noxious influences. Their most violent rage dissolves in good-natured raillery; their passions, stripped of all earthly matter, are merely an ideal dream. To correspond with this, the loves of mortals are painted as a poetical enchantment, which, by a contrary enchantment, may be immediately suspended, and then renewed again. The different parts of the plot; the wedding of Theseus, the disagreement of Oberon and Titania, the flight of the two pair of lovers, and the theatrical operations of the mechanics, are so lightly and happily interwoven, that they seem necessary to each other for the formation of a whole. Oberon is desirous of relieving the lovers from their perplexities, and greatly adds to them through the misapprehension of his servant, till he at last comes to the aid of their fruitless amorous pain, their inconstancy and jealousy, and restores fidelity to its old rights. The extremes of fanciful and vulgar are united when the enchanted Titania awakes and falls in love with a coarse mechanic with an ass's-head, who represents, or rather disfigures, the part of a tragical lover. The droll wonder of the transmutation of Bottom is merely the translation of a meta-

phor in its literal sense; but in his behaviour during the tender homage of the Fairy Queen, we have a most amusing proof how much the consciousness of such a head-dress heightens the effect of his usual folly. Theseus and Hippolyta are, as it were, a splendid frame for the picture; they take no part in the action, but appear with a stately pomp. The discourse of the hero and his Amazon, as they course through the forest with their noisy hunting train, works upon the imagination like the fresh breath of morning, before which the shapes of night disappear. Pyramus and Thisbe is not unmeaningly chosen as the grotesque play within the play: it is exactly like the pathetic part of the piece, a secret meeting of two lovers in the forest, and their dispersion by an unfortunate accident, and closes the whole with the most amusing parody.

*The Tempest* has little action and progressive movement: the union of Ferdinand and Miranda is fixed at their first meeting, and Prospero merely throws apparent obstacles in their way; the shipwrecked band go leisurely about the island; the attempts of Sebastian and Antonio on the life of the King of Naples, and of Caliban and the drunken sailors against Prospero, are nothing but a feint, as we foresee that they will be completely frustrated by the magical skill of the latter; nothing remains therefore but the punishment of the guilty by dreadful sights which harrow up their consciences, the discovery and final reconciliation. Yet this want is so admirably concealed by the most varied display of the fascinations of poetry, and the exhilaration

of mirth, the details of the execution are so very attractive, that it requires no small degree of attention to perceive that the denouement is, in some degree, already contained in the exposition. The history of the love of Ferdinand and Miranda, developed in a few short scenes, is enchantingly beautiful: an affecting union of chivalrous magnanimity on the one part, and on the other of the virgin openness of a heart which, brought up far from the world on an uninhabited island, has never learned to disguise its innocent movements. The wisdom of the princely hermit Prospero has a magical and mysterious air; the impression of the black falsehood of the two usurpers is mitigated by the honest gossiping of the old and faithful Gonzalo; Trinculo and Stephano, two good-for-nothing drunkards, find a worthy associate in Caliban; and Ariel hovers sweetly over the whole as the personified genius of the wonderful fable.

Caliban has become a by-word as the strange creation of a poetical imagination. A mixture of the gnome and the savage, half dæmon, half brute, in his behaviour we perceive at once the traces of his native disposition, and the influence of Prospero's education. The latter could only unfold his understanding, without, in the slightest degree, taming his rooted malignity: it is as if the use of reason and human speech should be communicated to a stupid ape. Caliban is malicious, cowardly, false, and base in his inclinations; and yet he is essentially different from the vulgar knaves of a civilized world, as they are occasionally portrayed by Shak-



speare. He is rude, but not vulgar; he never falls into the prosaical and low familiarity of his drunken associates, for he is a poetical being in his way; he always too speaks in verse. He has picked up every thing dissonant and thorny in language, out of which he has composed his vocabulary, and of the whole variety of nature the hateful, repulsive, and pettily deformed, have alone been impressed on his imagination. The magical world of spirits, which the staff of Prospero has assembled on the island, casts merely a faint reflection into his mind, as a ray of light which falls into a dark cave, incapable of communicating to it either heat or illumination, merely serves to put in motion the poisonous vapours. The whole delineation of this monster is inconceivably consistent and profound, and, notwithstanding its hatefulness, by no means hurtful to our feelings, as the honour of human nature is left untouched.

In the Zephyr-like Ariel the image of air is not to be mistaken, his name even bears an allusion to it; as, on the other hand, Caliban signifies the heavy element of earth. Yet they are neither of them allegorical personifications, but beings individually determined. In general we find, in *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *The Tempest*, in the magical part of *Macbeth*, and wherever Shakspeare avails himself of the popular belief in the invisible presence of spirits, and the possibility of coming in contact with them, a profound view of the inward life of nature and her mysterious springs, which, it is true, ought never to be altogether unknown to the genuine poet, as poetry is altogether incom-

patible with mechanical physics, but which few have possessed in an equal degree with Dante and himself.

*The Winter's Tale* is as appropriately named as *The Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is one of those tales which are peculiarly calculated to beguile the dreary leisure of a long winter evening, which are even attractive and intelligible to childhood, and which, animated by fervent truth in the delineation of character and passion, invested with the decoration of a poetry lowering itself, as it were, to the simplicity of the subject, transport even manhood back to the golden age of imagination. The calculation of probabilities has nothing to do with such wonderful and fleeting adventures, ending at last in general joy; and accordingly Shakspeare has here taken the greatest liberties with anachronisms and geographical errors: he opens a free navigation between Sicily and Bohemia, makes Giulio Romano the contemporary of the Delphic oracle, not to mention other incongruities. The piece divides itself in some degree into two plays. Leontes becomes suddenly jealous of his royal bosom friend Polyxenes, who has visited him, makes an attempt on his life, and Polyxenes saves himself by a clandestine flight; Hermione, suspected of infidelity, is thrown into prison, and the daughter which she brings into the world is exposed on a remote coast; the accused Queen declared innocent by the oracle, on learning that her infant son has pined to death on her account, falls down senseless, and is mourned as dead by her husband who becomes sensible when

too late of his error : this makes the subject of the three first acts. The last two are separated from these by a chasm of sixteen years : but the above tragical catastrophe was only apparent, and this serves to connect the two parts. The Princess, who has been exposed on the coast of the kingdom of Polyxenes, grows up among low shepherds ; but her tender beauty, her noble manners, and elevation of sentiment, bespeak her descent ; the Crown Prince Florizel, in the course of his hawking falls in with her, becomes enamoured, and courts her in the disguise of a shepherd ; at a rural entertainment Polyxenes discovers their intention, and breaks out into a violent rage ; the two lovers seek refuge from his persecution at the court of Leontes in Sicily, when the discovery and general reconciliation take place. When Leontes at last beholds, as he imagines, the statue of his lost spouse, she descends to him from her niche : it is she herself, the still living Hermione, who has kept herself so long concealed ; and the piece ends with universal rejoicing. The jealousy of Leontes is not, like that of Othello, developed with all the causes, symptoms, and gradations ; it is brought forward at once, and is portrayed as a distempered frenzy. It is a passion with whose effects the spectator is more concerned than with its origin, and which does not produce the catastrophe, but merely ties the knot of the piece. In fact, the poet might perhaps have wished to indicate slightly that Hermione, though virtuous, was too active in her efforts to please Polyxenes ; and it appears as if this germ of an inclination first attained

its proper maturity in their children. Nothing can be more fresh and youthful, nothing at once so ideally pastoral and princely as the love of Florizel and Perdita; of the Prince, whom love converts into a voluntary shepherd; and the Princess, who betrays her exalted origin without knowing it, and in whose hands the nosegays become crowns. Shakspeare has never hesitated to place ideal poetry close by the side of the most vulgar prose: and this is also generally the case in the world of reality. Perdita's foster-father and his son are both made simple boors, that we may the more distinctly see whatever ennobles her belongs to herself. The merry pedlar and pickpocket Autolycus, so inimitably portrayed, is necessary to complete the rustic feast, which Perdita on her part seems to render fit for an assemblage of deities in disguise.

*Cymbeline* is also one of Shakspeare's most wonderful compositions. He has here connected a novel of Boccacio with traditionary tales of the ancient Britons reaching back to the times of the first Roman Emperors, and he has contrived, by the most gentle transitions, to blend together into one harmonious whole the social manners of the latest times with heroic deeds, and even with appearances of the gods. In the character of Imogen not a feature of female excellence is forgotten: her chaste tenderness, her softness, and her virgin pride, her boundless resignation, and her magnanimity towards her mistaken husband by whom she is unjustly persecuted, her adventures in disguise, her apparent death, and her recovery, form altogether



a picture equally tender and affecting. The two Princes Guiderius and Arviragus, both educated in the wilds, form a noble contrast to Miranda and Perdita. Shakspeare is fond of showing the superiority of the innate over the acquired. Over the art which enriches nature he somewhere says, there is always a higher art created by nature herself.\* As Miranda's unconscious and unstudied sweetness is more pleasing than those charms which endeavour to captivate us by the brilliant decoration of the most refined cultivation, so in these two young

\* The passage in Shakspeare here quoted, taken with the context, will not bear the construction of the author. The whole runs thus :—

Yet nature is made better by no mean,  
But nature makes that mean : so, o'er that art  
Which you say adds to nature, is an art  
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry  
A gentler scion to the wildest stock ;  
And make conceive a bark of baser kind  
By bud of nobler race : this is an art  
Which does mend nature, change it rather ; but  
The art itself is nature.

*Winter's Tale, Act iv. Scene 3.*

Shakspeare does not here mean to institute a comparison between the relative excellency of that which is innate and that which we owe to instruction ; but merely says, that the instruction or art is itself a part of nature. The speech is addressed by Polyxenes to Perdita, to persuade her that the changes effected in the appearance of flowers by the art of the gardener are not to be accounted unnatural ; and the expression of *making conceive a bark of baser kind by bud of nobler race* (i. e. engrafting), would rather lead to the inference, that the mind derived its chief value from the influence of culture.—TRANS.

men, to whom the chase has given vigour and hardihood, but who are unacquainted with their high destination, and have been always kept far from human society, we are equally enchanted by a *naïve* heroism which leads them to anticipate and to dream of deeds of valour, till an occasion is offered which they are irresistibly impelled to embrace. When Imogen comes in disguise to their cave; when Guiderius and Arviragus form an impassioned friendship with all the innocence of childhood for the tender boy, in whom they neither suspect a female nor their own sister; when on returning from the chase they find her dead, “sing her to the ground,” and cover the grave with flowers:—these scenes might give a new life for poetry to the most deadened imagination. If a tragical event is only apparent, whether the spectators are already aware of this or ought merely to suspect it, Shakspeare always knows how to mitigate the impression without weakening it: he makes the mourning musical, that it may gain in solemnity what it loses in seriousness. With respect to the other parts, the wise and vigorous Belarius, who after living long as a hermit again becomes a hero, is a venerable figure; the dexterous dissimulation and quick presence of mind of the Italian Iachimo is quite suitable to the bold treachery which he plays; Cymbeline, the father of Imogen, and even her husband Posthumus, during the first half of the piece, are somewhat sacrificed, but this could not be otherwise; the false and wicked Queen is merely an instrument of the plot; she and her stupid son Cloton (the

only comic part in the piece) whose rude arrogance is portrayed with much humor, are got rid of by merited punishment before the conclusion. For the heroical part of the fable, the war between the Romans and Britons which brings on the conclusion, the poet in the extent of his plan had so little room to spare, that he merely endeavours to represent it as a mute procession. But to the last scene, where all the numerous threads of the knot are untied, he has again given its full developement, that he might collect the impressions of the whole into one focus. This example and many others are a sufficient refutation of Johnson's assertion that Shakspeare usually hurries over the conclusion of his pieces. He rather introduces a great deal which, for the understanding of the *denouement*, might in a strict sense be spared, from a desire to satisfy the feeling: our modern spectators are much more impatient than those of his day to see the curtain drop when there is nothing more to be determined.

*Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*, differ from the most of the pieces which we have hitherto gone through neither in the ingredients of the composition, nor in the manner of treating them: it is merely the direction of the whole which gives them the stamp of tragedies. *Romeo and Juliet* is a picture of love and its pitiable fate, in a world whose atmosphere is too rough for this tenderest blossom of human life. Two beings created for each other feel mutual love at a first glance; every consideration disappears before the irresistible influence of living in one another; they join themselves secretly

under circumstances hostile in the highest degree to their union, relying merely on the protection of an invisible power. By unfriendly events following blow upon blow their heroic constancy is exposed to all manner of trials, till, forcibly separated from each other, by a voluntary death they are united in the grave to meet again in another world. All this is to be found in the beautiful story which Shakspeare has not invented, and which, however simply told, will always excite a tender sympathy: but it was reserved for Shakspeare to unite purity of heart and the glow of imagination, sweetness and dignity of manners and passionate violence, in one ideal picture. By the manner in which he has handled it, it has become a glorious song of praise on that inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul and gives to it its highest sublimity, and which elevates even the senses themselves into soul, and at the same time is a melancholy elegy on its frailty from its own nature and external circumstances; at once the deification and the burial of love. It appears here like a heavenly spark that, descending to the earth, is converted into a flash of lightning, by which mortal creatures are almost in the same moment set on fire and consumed. Whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous on the first opening of the rose, is breathed into this poem. But even more rapidly than the earliest blossoms of youth and beauty decay, it hurries on from the first timidly-bold declaration of love and modest return to the most unlimited passion, to an



irrevocable union ; then, amidst alternating storms of rapture and despair, to the death of the two lovers, who still appear enviable as their love survives them, and as by their death they have obtained a triumph over every separating power. The sweetest and the bitterest, love and hatred, festivity and dark forebodings, tender embraces and sepulchres, the fullness of life and self-annihilation, are all here brought close to each other ; and all these contrasts are so blended in the harmonious and wonderful work into a unity of impression, that the echo which the whole leaves behind in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh.

The excellent dramatic arrangement, the signification of each character in its place, the judicious selection of all the circumstances even the most minute, I have unfolded in detail in a treatise already cited, and I will not therefore here repeat myself. I shall only request attention to one trait which I there omitted, and which may serve for an example of the distance from which Shakspeare begins his preparations. The most striking and perhaps incredible circumstance in the whole story is the liquor given by the Monk to Julia, by which she for a number of hours not merely sleeps but fully resembles a corpse, without thereby receiving any injury. How does the poet dispose us to believe that Father Lorenzo possesses such a secret ?—He exhibits him to us at his first entrance in a garden, where he is collecting herbs and descanting on their wonderful virtues. The discourse of the pious old man is full of deep meaning : he sees every

where in nature symbols of the moral world; the same wisdom with which he looks through her has made him master of the human heart. In this manner a circumstance of an obstinate, or at least an ungrateful appearance, has become the source of a great beauty.

If *Romeo and Juliet* shines with the colours of the dawn of morning, but a dawn whose purple clouds already announce the thunder of a sultry day, *Othello* is, on the other hand, a strongly shaded picture: we might call it a tragical *Rembrandt*.—What a fortunate mistake that the Moor, under which name a baptized Saracen of the Northern coast of Africa was unquestionably meant in the novel, has been made by Shakspeare in every respect a negro! We recognize in *Othello* the wild nature of that glowing zone which generates the most raging beasts of prey and the most deadly poisons, tamed only in appearance by the desire of fame, by foreign laws of honour, and by nobler and milder manners. His jealousy is not the jealousy of the heart, which is compatible with the tenderest feeling and adoration of the beloved object; it is of that sensual kind which, in burning climes, has given birth to the disgraceful confinement of women and many other unnatural usages. A drop of this poison flows in his veins, and sets his whole blood in the most disorderly fermentation. The Moor seems noble, frank, confiding, grateful for the love shown him; and he is all this, and, moreover, a hero who spurns at danger, a worthy leader of an army, a faithful servant of the state; but the mere physical force of

passion puts to flight in one moment all his acquired and accustomed virtues, and gives the upper hand to the savage in him over the moral man. This tyranny of the blood over the will betrays itself even in the expression of his desire of revenge against Cassio. In his repentance when he views the evidence of the deed, a genuine tenderness for his murdered wife, and the painful feeling of his annihilated honour, at last burst forth ; and he every now and then assails himself with the rage which a despot betrays in punishing a runaway slave. He suffers as a double man ; at once in the higher and lower sphere into which his being was divided.—While the Moor bears only the nightly colour of suspicion and deceit on his visage, Iago is black within. He pursues Othello like his evil spirit, and with his light, and therefore the more dangerous, insinuations, he leaves him no rest ; it is as if by means of an unfortunate affinity, founded however in nature, this influence was by necessity more powerful over him than the voice of his good angel Desdemona. A more artful villain than this Iago was never portrayed ; he spreads his nets with a skill which nothing can escape. The repugnance inspired by his aims becomes supportable from the attention of the spectators being directed to his means : they furnish infinite employment to the understanding. Cool, discontented, and morose, arrogant where he dare be so, but humble and insinuating when it suits his purposes, he is a complete master in the art of dissimulation ; accessible only to selfish emotions, he is thoroughly skilled in rous-

ing the passions of others, and of availing himself of every opening which they give him: he is as excellent an observer of men as any one can be who is unacquainted with higher motives of action from his own experience; there is always some truth in his malicious observations on them. He does not merely pretend an obdurate incredulity as to the virtue of women, he actually entertains it; and this, too, falls in with his whole way of thinking, and makes him the more fit for the execution of his purpose. As in every thing he sees merely the hateful side, he dissolves in the rudest manner the charm which the imagination casts over the relation between the two sexes: he does so for the purpose of throwing into commotion the senses of Othello, whom his heart might have easily convinced of Desdemona's innocence. This must serve as an excuse for the numerous expressions in the speeches of Iago from which modesty shrinks back. If Shakspeare had written in our days he would not perhaps have dared to hazard them; but this must certainly have very much injured the truth of his picture. Desdemona is an offering without blemish. She is not, it is true, a high ideal representation of sweetness and enthusiastic passion like Juliet; full of simplicity, softness, and humility, and so innocent, that she can hardly form to herself an idea of the possibility of infidelity, she seems calculated to make the most yielding and tender wife. The female propensity wholly to follow a foreign destiny has led her into the only error she ever committed, that of marrying without the consent of her father. Her



choice seems wrong; and yet she has been gained over to Othello by that which induces the female to honour in man her protector and guide,—admiration of his determined heroism, and compassion for the sufferings which he had undergone. With great art it is so contrived, that from the very circumstance that the possibility of a suspicion of herself never once enters her mind, she is the less reserved in her solicitation for Cassio, by which she more and more heightens the jealousy of the Moor. To give still greater effect to the angelic purity of Desdemona, Shakspeare has in Emilia associated with her a companion of doubtful virtue. From the sinful levity of this woman it is also conceivable, that she should not confess the abstraction of the handkerchief when Othello violently demands it back: this would otherwise be the circumstance in the whole piece the most difficult to justify. Cassio is portrayed exactly as he ought to be to excite suspicion without actual guilt,—amiable and nobly disposed, but easily seduced. The public events of the first two acts show us Othello in his most glorious aspect, as the support of Venice and the terror of the Turks: they serve to withdraw the story from the mere domestic circle, which is done in *Romeo and Juliet* by the dissensions between the houses of Montague and Capulet. No eloquence is capable of painting the overwhelming force of the catastrophe in *Othello*, the pressure of feelings which measure out in a moment the abysses of eternity.

*Hamlet* is single in its kind: a tragedy of thought inspired by continual and never satisfied meditation

on human destiny and the dark perplexity of the events of this world, and calculated to call forth the very same meditation in the minds of the spectators. This enigmatical work resembles those irrational equations in which a fraction of unknown magnitude always remains, that will in no manner admit of solution. Much has been said, much written on this piece, and yet no thinking head who anew expresses himself on it will, in his view of the connexion and the signification of all the parts, entirely coincide with his predecessors. It must astonish us the most, that with such hidden purposes, with a foundation laid in such unfathomable depth, the whole should, at a first view, exhibit an extremely popular appearance. The dread appearance of the Ghost takes possession of the mind and the imagination almost at the very commencement; then the play within the play, in which we see reflected as in a glass the crime, the fruitlessly attempted punishment of which constitutes the subject of the piece; the alarm with which it fills the King; Hamlet's pretended and Ophelia's real madness; her death and burial; the meeting of Hamlet and Laertes at her grave; their combat, and the grand determination; lastly, the appearance of the young hero Fortinbras who, with warlike pomp, pays the last honours to an extinguished Royal Family; the comic characteristic scenes with Polonius, the Courtiers, and the Grave-diggers interspersed, which have all of them their signification,—all this fills the stage with the most animated and varied movements. The only circumstance from

which this piece might be found less theatrical than other tragedies of Shakspeare is, that in the last scenes the main action either stands still or appears to retrograde. This however was inevitable, and lies in the nature of the thing. The whole is intended to show that a consideration which would exhaust all the relations and possible consequences of a deed to the very limits of human foresight, cripples the power of acting; as Hamlet himself expresses it:—

And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;  
And enterprises of great pith and moment,  
With this regard, their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action.

Respecting Hamlet's character, I cannot, according to the views of the poet as I understand them, pronounce altogether so favourable a sentence as Goethe's. He is, it is true, a mind of high cultivation, a prince of royal manners, endowed with the finest sense of propriety, susceptible of noble ambition, and open in the highest degree to enthusiasm for the foreign excellence in which he is deficient. He acts the part of madness with inimitable superiority; while he convinces the persons who are sent to examine him of his loss of reason, merely because he tells them unwelcome truths, and rallies them with the most caustic wit. But in the resolutions which he so often embraces and always leaves unexecuted, the weakness of his volition is evident: he does himself only justice

when he says there is no greater dissimilarity, than between himself and Hercules. He is not solely impelled by necessity to artifice and dissimulation, he has a natural inclination to go crooked ways; he is a hypocrite towards himself: his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination; thoughts, as he says on a different occasion, which have

——but one part wisdom  
And ever three parts coward.——

He has been chiefly condemned for his harshness in repulsing the love of Ophelia, to which he himself gave rise, and for his unfeelingness at her death. But he is too much overwhelmed with his own sorrow to have any compassion to spare for others: his indifference gives us by no means the measure of his internal perturbation. On the other hand, we evidently perceive in him a malicious joy, when he has succeeded more through necessity and accident, which are alone able to impel him to quick and decisive measures, than from the merit of his courage in getting rid of his enemies; for so he expresses himself after the murder of Polonius, and respecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet has no firm belief either in himself or in any thing else: from expressions of religious confidence he passes over to sceptical doubts; he believes in the Ghost of his father when he sees it, and as soon as it has disappeared, it appears to him almost in the



light of a deception.\* He has even got so far as to say, "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so;" the poet loses himself with him in the labyrinths of thought, in which we neither find end nor beginning. The stars themselves, from the course of events, afford no answer to the questions so urgently proposed to them. A voice, commissioned as it would appear by heaven from another world, demands vengeance for a monstrous enormity, and the demand remains without effect; the criminals are at last punished, but, as it were, by an accidental blow, and not in a manner requisite to announce with solemnity a warning example of justice to the world; irresolute foresight, cunning treachery, and impetuous rage, are hurried on to the same destruction; the less guilty or the innocent are equally involved in the general destruction. The destiny of humanity is there exhibited as a gigantic sphinx, which threatens to precipitate whoever is unable to solve her dreadful enigma into the abyss of scepticism.

As one example of the many niceties of Shakspeare which have never been understood, I may allude to

\* It has been censured as a contradiction, that Hamlet in the soliloquy on self-murder should say

The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn  
No traveller returns——

For was not the Ghost a returned traveller? Shakspeare however purposely wished to show, that Hamlet could not fix himself in any conviction of any kind whatever.

the style in which the speech of the player respecting Hecuba is conceived. It has been the subject of much controversy among the commentators, whether this was borrowed from Shakspeare himself or from others, and whether, in the praise of the piece of which it is supposed to be a part, he was speaking seriously, or merely meant to ridicule the tragical bombast of his contemporaries. It never occurred to them that this speech must not be judged of by itself, but in connexion with the place where it is introduced. To distinguish it as dramatic poetry in the play itself, it was necessary that it should rise above its dignified poetry in the same proportion that the theatrical elevation does above simple nature.— Hence Shakspeare has composed the play in Hamlet altogether in sententious rhymes full of antitheses. But this solemn and measured tone did not suit a speech in which violent emotion ought to prevail, and the poet had no other expedient than the one of which he made choice : overcharging the pathos. The language of the speech in question is certainly falsely emphatical ; but yet this fault is so mixed up with true grandeur, that a player practised in calling forth in himself artificially the imitated emotions may certainly be carried away by it. Besides, it will hardly be believed that Shakspeare knew so little of his art, as not to be aware that a tragedy in which Æneas had to make a lengthened epic relation of a transaction that happened so long before as the destruction of Troy, could neither be dramatical nor theatrical.

Of *Macbeth* I have already spoken once in pass-

ing, and who could exhaust the praise of this sublime work? Since *The Furies* of Æschylus, nothing so grand and terrible has ever been composed. The Witches are not, it is true, divine Eumenides, and are not intended to be so: they are ignoble and vulgar instruments of hell. A German poet therefore very ill understood their meaning, when he transformed them into mongrel beings a mixture of fates, furies, and enchantresses, and clothed them with tragical dignity. Let no man lay hand on Shakspeare's works to change any thing essential in them: he will be sure to punish himself. The bad is radically odious, and to endeavour in any manner to ennoble it is to violate the laws of propriety. Hence, in my opinion, Dante, and even Tasso, have been much more successful in their portraiture of dæmons than Milton. Whether the age of Shakspeare still believed in witchcraft and ghosts is a matter of perfect indifference for the justification of the use which in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* he has made of pre-existing traditions. No superstition can ever be prevalent and widely diffused through ages and nations without having a foundation in human nature: on this foundation the poet builds; he calls up from their hidden abysses that dread of the unknown, that presage of a dark side of nature, and a world of spirits, which philosophy now imagines it has altogether exploded. In this manner he is in some degree both the portrayer and the philosopher of a superstition, that is, not the philosopher who denies and turns into ridicule, but, which is still more difficult, who distinctly exhibits its origin to us in

apparently irrational and yet natural opinions. But when he ventures to make arbitrary changes in these popular traditions, he altogether forfeits his right to them, and merely holds up his own peculiarities to our ridicule. Shakspeare's picture of the witches is truly magical: in the short scenes where they enter, he has created for them a peculiar language, which, although composed of the usual elements, still seems to be a collection of formulæ of incantation. The sound of the words, the accumulation of rhymes, and the rhythmus of the verse, form as it were the hollow music of a dreary dance of witches. He has been abused for introducing the names of disgusting objects: but he who supposes that the kettle of the witches can be made effective with agreeable aromatics, has no better understanding of the subject, than those who are desirous that hell should sincerely and honourably give good advice. These repulsive things, from which the imagination shrinks back, are here a symbol of the hostile powers which operate in nature, and the mental horror outweighs the repugnance of our senses. The witches discourse with one another like women of the very lowest class, for this was the class to which witches were supposed to belong; when however they address Macbeth their tone assumes more elevation: their predictions, which they either themselves pronounce, or allow their apparitions to deliver, have all the obscure brevity, the majestic solemnity, by which oracles have in all times contrived to inspire mortals with reverential awe. We here see that the witches are merely instruments; they are



governed by an invisible spirit, or the operation of such great and dreadful events would be above their sphere. To what intent did Shakspeare assign the same place to them in his play, which they occupy in the history of Macbeth as related in the old chronicles? A monstrous crime is committed: Duncan, a venerable old man, and the best of kings, is murdered by his subject, whom he has loaded with honours and rewards, in defenceless sleep, under the hospitable roof. Natural motives alone seem inadequate, or he must have portrayed the perpetrator as a most hardened villain. Shakspeare wished to exhibit a more sublime picture to us: an ambitious but noble hero, who yields to a deep-laid hellish temptation; and all the crimes to which he is impelled by necessity, to secure the fruits of his first crime, cannot altogether eradicate in him the stamp of native heroism. He has therefore given a threefold division to the guilt of that crime. The first idea comes from that being whose whole activity is guided by a lust of wickedness. The weird sisters surprise Macbeth in the moment of intoxication after his victory, when his love of glory has been gratified; they cheat his eyes by exhibiting to him as the work of fate what can only in reality be accomplished by his own deed, and gain credence for their words by the immediate fulfilment of the first prediction. The opportunity for murdering the king immediately offers itself; the wife of Macbeth conjures him not to let it slip: she urges him on with a fiery eloquence, which has all those sophisms at command that serve to throw a false

grandeur over crime. Little more than the mere execution falls to the share of Macbeth ; he is driven to it as it were in a state of commotion in which his mind is bewildered. Repentance immediately follows, nay, even precedes the deed, and the stings of his conscience leave him no rest either night or day. But he is now fairly entangled in the snares of hell ; it is truly frightful to behold that Macbeth, who once as a warrior could spurn at death, now that he dreads the prospect of the life to come,\* clinging with growing anxiety to his earthly existence, the more miserable it becomes, and pitilessly removing out of his way whatever to his dark and suspicious mind seems to threaten danger. However much we may abhor his actions, we cannot altogether refuse to sympathise with the state of his mind ; we lament the ruin of so many noble qualities, and even in his last defence we are compelled to admire in him the struggle of a brave will with a cowardly conscience. We might believe that we witness in this tragedy the over-ruling destiny of the ancients entirely according to their ideas : the whole originates in a supernatural influence, to which the subsequent events seem inevitably linked. We even find again here the same ambiguous oracles which, by their literal fulfilment, deceive those who confide in them. Yet it may be shown that the poet has displayed more enlightened views in his work. He wishes to show that the conflict of good and evil in this world can only take place by the

\* We'd jump the life to come.

permission of Providence, which converts the curse that individual mortals draw down on their heads into a blessing to others. An accurate scale is followed in the retaliation. Lady Macbeth, who of all the human beings is the most guilty participator in the murder of the king, falls through the horrors of her conscience into a state of incurable bodily and mental disease; she dies, unlamented by her husband, with all the symptoms of reprobation. Macbeth is still found worthy of dying the death of a hero on the field of battle. The noble Macduff is allowed the satisfaction of saving his country by punishing with his own hand the tyrant who destroyed his wife and his children. Banquo atones for the ambitious curiosity which prompted him to wish to know his glorious descendants by an early death, as he thereby rouses Macbeth's jealousy; but he preserved his mind pure from the bubbles of the witches: his name is blessed in his race, destined to enjoy for a long succession of ages that royal dignity which Macbeth could only hold during his own life. In the progress of the action, this piece is altogether the reverse of *Hamlet*: it strides forward with amazing rapidity, from the first catastrophe (for Duncan's murder may be called a catastrophe) to the last. "Thought, and done!" is the general motto; for as Macbeth says,

The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,  
Unless the deed go with it.

In every feature we see a vigorous heroic age in the hardy North which steels every nerve. The precise

duration of the action cannot be ascertained,—years perhaps according to the story ; but we know that to the imagination the most crowded time appears always the shortest. Here we can hardly conceive how so very much can be compressed into so narrow a space ; not merely external events,—the very innermost recesses of the minds of the persons of the drama are laid open to us. It is as if the drags were taken from the wheels of time, and they rolled along without interruption in their descent. Nothing can equal the power of this picture in the excitation of horror. We need only allude to the circumstances attending the murder of Duncan, the dagger that hovers before the eyes of Macbeth, the vision of Banquo at the feast, the madness of Lady Macbeth ; what can we possibly say on the subject that will not rather weaken the impression ? Such scenes stand alone, and are to be found only in this poet ; otherwise the tragic muse might exchange her mask for the head of Medusa.

I wish merely to point out as a secondary circumstance the prudent dexterity of Shakspeare, who knew how to flatter a king by a work of which the poetical views are evident in every part of the plan. James the First derived his lineage from Banquo ; he was the first who united the threefold sceptre of England, Scotland, and Ireland : this is shown in the magical vision, when a long series of glorious successors is promised to him. Even the power of the English kings to heal certain maladies by the touch, which James pretended to have inherited from Edward the Confessor, and on which he set a



great value, is mentioned in a natural manner.\*— With such occasional pieces we may well allow ourselves to be pleased without fearing any danger to poetry: by similar allusions Æschylus endeavoured to recommend the Areopagus to his fellow-citizens, and Sophocles to celebrate the glory of Athens.

As terror in *Macbeth* reaches its utmost height, in *King Lear* the science of compassion is exhausted. The principal characters here are not those who act, but those who suffer. We have not in this, as in most tragedies, the picture of a calamity in which the sudden blows of fate seem still to honour the head whom they strike, in which the loss is always accompanied by some flattering consolation in the memory of the former possession; but a fall from the highest elevation into the deepest abyss of misery, where humanity is stripped of all external and internal advantages, and given up a prey to naked helplessness. The threefold dignity of a king, an old man, and a father, is dishonoured by the cruel ingratitude of his unnatural daughters; the old Lear, who out of a foolish tenderness has given away every thing, is driven out to the world a wandering beggar; the childish imbecility to which he was fast advancing changes into the wild-

\* The naming of Edward the Confessor gives us at the same time the epoch in which these historically accredited transactions are made to take place. The ruins of Macbeth's palace are yet standing at Inverness; the present Earls of Fife are the descendents of the valiant Macduff, and down to the union of Scotland with England they were in the enjoyment of peculiar privileges for their merits towards the crown.

est insanity, and when he is saved from the disgraceful destitution to which he was abandoned it is too late : the kind consolations of filial care and attention and true friendship are now lost on him ; his bodily and mental powers are destroyed beyond all hope of recovery, and all that now remains to him of life is the capability of loving and suffering beyond measure. What a picture we have in the meeting of Lear and Edgar in a tempestuous night and in a wretched hovel ! Edgar, a youth, by the wicked arts of his brother and his father's blindness, has fallen as low from the rank to which his birth entitled him as Lear ; and he is reduced to assume the disguise of a beggar tormented by evil spirits as the only means of escaping pursuit. The King's fool, notwithstanding the voluntary degradation which is implied in his situation, is, after Kent, Lear's most faithful associate, his wisest counsellor. This good-hearted fool clothes reason with the livery of his motley garb ; the high-born beggar acts the part of insanity ; and both, were they even in reality what they seem, would still be enviable in comparison with the King, who feels that the violence of his grief threatens to overpower his reason. The meeting of Edgar with the blinded Gloucester is equally heart-rending ; nothing can be more affecting than to see the ejected son become the father's guide, and the good angel, who under the disguise of insanity, by an ingenious and pious fraud, saves him from the horror and despair of self-murder. But who can possibly enumerate all the different combinations and situations by which our

minds are stormed by the poet? I will only make one observation respecting the structure of the whole. The story of Lear and his daughters was left by Shakspeare exactly as he found it in a fabulous tradition, with all the features characteristic of the simplicity of old times. But in that tradition there is not the slightest trace of the story of Gloster and his sons, which was derived by Shakspeare from another source. The incorporation of the two stories has been censured as destructive of the unity of action. But whatever contributes to the intrigue or the *denouement* must always possess unity. And with what ingenuity and skill the two main parts of the composition are dovetailed into one another! The pity felt by Gloster for the fate of Lear becomes the means which enables his son Edmund to effect his complete destruction, and affords the outcast Edgar an opportunity of being the saviour of his father. On the other hand, Edmund is active in the cause of Regan and Gonerill; and the criminal passion which they both entertain for him induces them to execute justice on each other and on themselves. The laws of the drama have therefore been sufficiently complied with; but that is the least: it is the very combination which constitutes the sublime beauty of the work. The two cases resemble each other in the main: an infatuated father is blind towards his well disposed child, and the unnatural offspring, to whom he gives the preference, requite him by the destruction of his entire happiness. But all the circumstances are so different that these stories, while they make an equal

impression on the heart, form a complete contrast for the imagination. Were Lear alone to suffer from his daughters, the impression would be limited to the powerful compassion felt by us for his private misfortune. But two such unheard of examples taking place at the same time have the appearance of a great commotion in the moral world: the picture becomes gigantic, and fills us with such alarm as we should entertain at the idea that the heavenly bodies might one day fall out of their regular orbits. To save in some degree the honour of human nature, Shakspeare never wishes that his spectators should forget that the story takes place in a dreary and barbarous age: he lays particular stress on the circumstance that the Britons of that day were still heathens, although he has not made all the remaining circumstances to coincide learnedly with the time which he has chosen. From this point of view we must judge of many coarsenesses in expression and manners; for instance, the immodest manner in which Gloster acknowledges his bastard, Kent's quarrel with the Steward, and more especially the cruelty personally exercised on Gloster by the Duke of Cornwall. Even the virtue of the honest Kent bears the stamp of an iron age, in which the good and the bad display the same ungovernable strength. Great qualities have not been superfluously assigned to the King; the poet could command our sympathy for his situation without concealing what he had done to bring himself into it. Lear is choleric, overbearing, and almost childish from age, when he drives out his youngest



daughter because she will not join in the hypocritical exaggerations of her sisters. But he has a warm and affectionate heart, which is susceptible of the most fervent gratitude; and even rays of a high and kingly disposition burst forth from the eclipse of his understanding. Of the heavenly beauty of soul of Cordelia, pronounced in so few words, I will not venture to speak; she can only be named along with Antigone. Her death has been thought too cruel; and in England the piece is so far altered in acting that she remains victorious and happy. I must own, I cannot conceive what ideas of art and dramatic connexion those persons have who suppose that we can at pleasure tack a double conclusion to a tragedy; a melancholy one for hard-hearted spectators, and a merry one for souls of a softer mould. After surviving so many sufferings, Lear can only die in a tragical manner from his grief for the death of Cordelia; and if he is also to be saved and to pass the remainder of his days in happiness, the whole loses its signification. According to Shakespeare's plan the guilty, it is true, are all punished; for wickedness destroys itself; but the auxiliatory virtues are every where too late, or overmatched by the cunning activity of malice. The persons of this drama have only such a faint belief in Providence as heathens may be supposed to have; and the poet here wishes to show us that this belief requires a wider range than the dark pilgrimage on earth to be established in its utmost extent.

These five tragedies of which I have just spoken are deservedly the most celebrated of the works of

Shakspeare. In the three last more especially, we have a display of an elevation of genius which may almost be said to exceed the powers of human nature: the mind is as much lost in the contemplation of all the heights and depths of these works as our feelings are overpowered by the first impression which they produce. However, of his historical plays some possess a high degree of tragical perfection, and all are distinguished by peculiar excellencies.

In the three Roman pieces, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the moderation with which Shakspeare excludes foreign appendages and arbitrary suppositions, and yet fully satisfies the wants of the stage, is particularly deserving of our admiration. These plays are the very thing itself; and under the apparent artlessness of adhering closely to history as he found it, an uncommon degree of art is concealed. Of every historical transaction Shakspeare knows how to seize the true poetical point of view, and to give unity and rounding to a series of events detached from the immeasurable extent of history without in any degree changing them. The public life of ancient Rome is called up from its grave, and exhibited before our eyes with the utmost grandeur and freedom of the dramatic form, and the heroes of Plutarch are ennobled by the most eloquent poetry.

In *Coriolanus* we have more comic intermixtures than in the others, as the many-headed multitude plays here a considerable part; and when Shak-

spere portrays the blind movements of the people in a mass, he almost always gives himself up to his merry humor. To the plebeians, whose folly is certainly sufficiently conspicuous already, the original old satirist Menenius is added by way of abundance. This gives rise to droll scenes of a description altogether peculiar, and which are alone compatible with such a political drama; for instance, when Coriolanus, to obtain the consulate, must solicit the lower order of citizens whom he holds in contempt for their cowardice in war, but cannot so far master his haughty disposition as to assume the customary humility, and yet extorts from them their votes.

I have already shown\* that the piece of *Julius Cæsar*, to complete the action, must be continued to the fall of Brutus and Cassius. Cæsar is not the hero of the piece, but Brutus. The amiable beauty of this character, his feeling and patriotic heroism, are portrayed with peculiar care. Yet the poet has pointed out with great nicety the superiority of Cassius over Brutus in independent volition and discernment in judging of human affairs; that the latter, from the purity of his mind and his conscientious love of justice, is unfit to be the head of a party in a state entirely corrupted; and that these very faults give an unfortunate turn to the cause of the conspirators. Several ostentatious speeches in the part of Cæsar have been censured as unsuitable. But as he never appears in action,

\* Vol. i. p. 331.

we have no other measure of his greatness than the impression which he makes upon the rest of the characters, and his peculiar confidence in himself. In this Cæsar was by no means deficient, as we learn from history and his own writings; but he displayed it more in the easy ridicule of his enemies than in pompous discourses. The theatrical effect of this play is injured by the falling off in some degree of the last two acts compared with the preceding in external splendour and rapidity. The first appearance of Cæsar in a festal dress, when the music stops and all are silent whenever he opens his mouth, and the few words which he utters are received as oracles, is truly magnificent; the conspiracy is a true conspiracy, that in stolen interviews and in the dead of night prepares the blow which is to be struck in open day, and which is to change the constitution of the world; the confused thronging before the murder of Cæsar, the general agitation even of the perpetrators after the deed, are portrayed in a most masterly manner; with the funeral procession and the speech of Antony the effect reaches its utmost height. Cæsar's shade is more powerful in avenging his fall than he himself was in guarding against it. After the overthrow of the external splendour and greatness of the conqueror and ruler of the world, the internal grandeur of character of Brutus and Cassius are all that remain to fill the stage and occupy the minds of the spectators: they stand there in some degree alone, suitably to their name, as the last of the Romans; and the forming a great and hazardous



determination is more powerfully calculated to excite our expectation, than the supporting the consequences of the deed with heroic firmness.

*Antony and Cleopatra* may, in some measure, be considered as a continuation of *Julius Cæsar*: the two principal characters of *Antony and Augustus* are equally sustained in both pieces. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play of great extent; the progress is less simple than in *Julius Cæsar*. The fulness and variety of political and warlike events, to which the union of the three divisions of the Roman world under one master necessarily gave rise, were perhaps too great to admit of being clearly exhibited in one dramatic picture. In this consists the great difficulty of the historical drama:—it must be a crowded extract, and a living developement of history:—the difficulty however has generally been successfully overcome by Shakspeare. But here many things, which are transacted in the back ground, are merely alluded to, in a manner which supposes an intimate acquaintance with the history; and a work of art should contain every thing necessary for fully understanding it within itself. Many persons of historical importance are merely introduced in passing; the preparatory and concurring circumstances are not sufficiently collected into masses to avoid distracting our attention. The principal personages, however, are most emphatically distinguished by lineament and colouring, and powerfully arrest the imagination. In Antony we observe a mixture of great qualities, weaknesses, and vices; violent ambition and ebullitions of magnanimity: we see him sunk

in luxurious enjoyments and nobly ashamed of his own aberrations,—manning himself to resolutions not unworthy of himself, which are always shipwrecked against the seductions of an artful woman. It is Hercules in the chains of Omphale, drawn from the fabulous heroic ages into history, and invested with the Roman costume. The seductive arts of Cleopatra are in no respect veiled over; she is an ambiguous being made up of royal pride, female vanity, luxury, inconstancy, and true attachment. Although the mutual passion of herself and Antony is without moral dignity, it still excites our sympathy as an insurmountable fascination:—they seem formed for each other, and Cleopatra is as remarkable for her seductive charms as Antony for the splendour of his deeds. As they die for each other, we forgive them for having lived for each other. The open and lavish character of Antony is admirably contrasted with the heartless littleness of Octavius Cæsar, whom Shakspeare seems to have completely seen through without allowing himself to be led astray by the fortune and the fame of Augustus.

*Timon of Athens*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, are not historical plays; but we cannot properly call them either tragedies or comedies. By the selection of the materials from antiquity they have some affinity to the Roman pieces, and hence I have hitherto abstained from mentioning them.

*Timon of Athens*, of all the works of Shakspeare, possesses most the character of satire:—a laughing satire in the picture of the parasites and flatterers, and a Juvenalian in the bitterness and the imprecations of Timon against the

ingratitude of a false world. The story is treated in a very simple manner, and is definitely divided into large masses :—in the first act the joyous life of Timon, his noble and hospitable extravagance, and the throng of every description of suitors to him ; in the second and third acts his embarrassment, and the trial which he is thereby reduced to make of his supposed friends, who all desert him in the hour of need ;—in the fourth and fifth acts, Timon's flight to the woods, his misanthropical melancholy, and his death. The only thing which may be called an episode is the banishment of Alcibiades, and his return by force of arms. However they are both examples of ingratitude,—the one of a state towards its defender, and the other of private friends to their benefactor. As the merits of the general towards his fellow-citizens suppose more strength of character than those of the generous prodigal, their respective behaviours are not less different : Timon frets himself to death, Alcibiades regains his lost dignity by violence. If the poet very properly sides with Timon against the common practice of the world, he is, on the other hand, by no means disposed to spare Timon. Timon was a fool in his generosity ; he is a madman in his discontent : he is every where wanting in the wisdom which enables a man in all things to observe the due measure. Although the truth of his extravagant feelings is proved by his death, and though when he digs up a treasure he spurns at the wealth which seems again to solicit him, we yet see distinctly enough that the vanity of wishing to be singular, in both the parts that he plays, had

some share in his liberal self-forgetfulness, as well as his anchoritical seclusion. This is particularly evident in the incomparable scene where the cynic Apemantus visits Timon in the wilderness. They have a sort of competition with each other in their trade of misanthropy: the Cynic reproaches the impoverished Timon with having been merely driven by necessity to take to the way of living which he had long been following of his free choice, and Timon cannot bear the thought of being merely an imitator of the Cynic. As in this subject the effect could only be produced by an accumulation of similar features, in the variety of the shades an amazing degree of understanding has been displayed by Shakspeare. What a powerfully diversified concert of flatteries and empty testimonies of devotedness! It is highly amusing to see the suitors, whom the ruined circumstances of their patron had dispersed, immediately flock to him again when they learn that he has been revisited by fortune. In the speeches of Timon, after he is undeceived, all the hostile figures of language are exhausted,—it is a dictionary of eloquent imprecations.

*Troilus and Cressida* is the only play of Shakspeare which he has allowed to be printed without being previously represented. It seems as if he here for once wished, without caring for theatrical effect, to satisfy the nicety of his peculiar wit, and the inclination to a certain guile, if I may say so, in the characterization. The whole is one continued irony of the crown of all heroic tales, the tale of Troy. The



contemptible nature of the origin of the Trojan war, the laziness and discord with which it was carried on, so that the siege was made to last ten years, by the noble descriptions, the sage and ingenious maxims with which the work overflows, and the high ideas which the heroes entertain of themselves and each other, are only placed in the clearer light. The stately behaviour of Agamemnon the irritation of Menelaus, the experience of Nestor, the cunning of Ulysses, are all productive of no effect; when they have at last arranged a combat between the coarse braggart Ajax and Hector, the latter will not fight in good earnest as Ajax is his cousin. Achilles is treated worst: after having long stretched himself out in arrogant idleness, and passed his time in the company of Thersites the buffoon, he falls upon Hector at a moment when he is defenceless, and kills him by means of his myrmidons. In all this let no man conceive that any indignity was intended to the venerable Homer. Shakspeare had not the Iliad before him, but the chivalrous romances of the Trojan war derived from Dares Phrygius. From this source also he took the love-intrigue of *Troilus and Cressida*, a story at one time so popular in England that the name of Troilus had become proverbial for faithful and ill requited love, and Cressida for female falsehood. The name of the agent between them, Pandarus, has even been adopted into the English language to signify those personages (*panders*) who dedicate themselves to similar services for unexperienced persons of both sexes. The endless contrivances of

the courteous Pandarus to bring the two lovers together, who do not stand in need of him, as Cressida requires no seduction, are comic in the extreme. The manner in which this treacherous beauty excites while she refuses, and converts the virgin modesty, which she pretends, into a means of seductive allurements, is portrayed in colours extremely elegant, though certainly somewhat voluptuous. Troilus, the pattern of lovers, looks patiently on, while his mistress enters into an intrigue with Diomed. He no doubt swears that he will be revenged; but notwithstanding his violence in the fight next day, he does no harm to any one, and ends with only high-sounding threats. In a word, Shakspeare did not wish, in this heroic comedy, where every thing from traditional fame and the pomp of poetry, seems to lay claim to admiration, that any room should be left for esteem and sympathy, if we except, perhaps, the character of Hector; but in this double meaning of the picture, he has afforded us the most choice entertainment.

The dramas derived from the English history are ten in number: one of the most valuable works of Shakspeare, and partly the fruit of his maturest age. I say advisedly, *one* of his works; for the poet has evidently intended them as parts of a great whole. It is, as it were, a historical heroic poem in the dramatic form, of which the separate plays constitute the rhapsodies. The principal features of the events are exhibited with such fidelity; their causes, and even their secret springs, are placed in such a clear light, that we may attain from them a know-

ledge of history in all its truth, while the living picture makes an impression on the imagination which can never be effaced. But this series of dramas is intended as the vehicle of a much higher and much more general instruction ; it affords examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times. This mirror of kings should be the manual of young princes : they may learn from it the inward dignity of their hereditary vocation, but they will also learn the difficulties of their situation, the dangers of usurpation, the inevitable fall of tyranny, which buries itself under its attempts to obtain a firmer foundation ; lastly, the ruinous consequences of the weaknesses, errors, and crimes of kings, for whole nations, and many subsequent generations. Eight of these plays, from *Richard the Second* to *Richard the Third*, are linked together in an uninterrupted succession, and embrace a most eventful period of nearly a century of English history. The events portrayed in them not only follow one another, but they are linked together in the closest and most exact manner ; and the circle of revolts, parties, civil and foreign wars, which began with the deposition of Richard the Second, first ends with the accession of Henry the Seventh to the throne. The negligent government of the first of these monarchs, and his injudicious behaviour towards his own relations, drew upon him the rebellion of Bolingbroke ; his dethronement was however altogether unjust in point of form, and in no case could Bolingbroke be considered the true heir of the crown. This shrewd founder of the

house of Lancaster never enjoyed, as Henry the Fourth, the fruits of his usurpation in peace: his turbulent Barons, the same who aided him in ascending the throne, never afterwards allowed him a moment's repose. On the other hand, he was jealous of the brilliant qualities of his son, and this distrust, more than any real inclination, induced the Prince to give himself up to dissolute society, that he might avoid every appearance of ambition. These two circumstances form the subject of the two divisions of *Henry the Fourth*; the enterprises of the discontented in the serious, and the wild youthful frolics of the heir apparent in the comic scenes. When this warlike Prince ascended the throne under the name of Henry the Fifth, he was determined to assert his ambiguous title; he considered foreign conquests as the best means of guarding against internal disturbances, and this gave rise to the glorious, but more ruinous than profitable, war with France, which Shakspeare has celebrated in the drama of *Henry the Fifth*. The early death of this king, the long minority of Henry the Sixth, and his continual minority in the art of government, brought the greatest misfortunes on England. The dissensions among the Regents, and the wretched administration which was the consequence, occasioned the loss of the French conquests; this brought forward a bold candidate for the crown, whose title was undisputed, if the prescription of three governments is not to be assumed as conferring validity on a usurpation. Such was the origin of the wars between the houses of York



and Lancaster, which desolated the kingdom for a number of years, and ended with the victory of the house of York. All this Shakspeare has represented in the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*. Edward the Fourth shortened his life by excesses, and did not long enjoy the throne purchased at the expense of so many cruel deeds. His brother Richard, who had had a great share in the elevation of the house of York, was not contented with the regency, and his ambition paved a way for him to the throne by treachery and violence; but his gloomy tyranny made him the object of the people's hatred, and at length drew on him the destruction which he merited. He was conquered by a descendant of the royal house who was unstained by the civil wars, and what might seem defective in his title was attoned for by the merit of freeing his country from a monster. With the accession of Henry the Seventh to the throne, a new epoch of English history begins: the curse seemed at length to be expiated, and the series of usurpations, revolts, and civil wars, all occasioned by the levity with which Richard the Second sported away the crown, was now brought to a termination.

Such is the evident connexion of these eight plays with each other, but they were not however composed in chronological order. According to all appearance, the four last were first written; this is certain, indeed with respect to the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*; and *Richard the Third* is not only from its subject a continuation of these, but is also composed in the same style. Shakspeare went

then back to *Richard the Second*, and with the most careful art connected the second series with the first. The trilogies of the ancients have already given us an example of the possibility of forming a perfect dramatic whole, which shall yet contain allusions to something which goes before, and follows it. In like manner the most of these plays end with a very definite division in the history: *Richard the Second*, with the murder of that King; *the Second Part of Henry the Fourth*, with the ascension of his son to the throne; *Henry the Fifth*, with the conclusion of peace with France; *the First Part of Henry the Sixth*, also, with a treaty of peace; the third, with the murder of Henry, and Edward's elevation to the throne; *Richard the Third*, with his overthrow and death. *The First Part of Henry the Fourth*, and *the Second of Henry the Sixth*, are rounded off in a less satisfactory manner. The revolt of the nobles was only half quelled by the overthrow of Percy, and it is therefore continued through the following part of the piece. The victory of York at St. Alban's could as little be considered a decisive event, in the war of the two houses. Shakspeare has fallen into this dramatic imperfection, if we may so call it, for the sake of advantages of much more importance. The picture of the civil war was too great and too rich in dreadful events for a single drama, and yet the uninterrupted series of events offered no more convenient resting place. The government of Henry the Fourth might certainly have been comprehended in one piece, but it possesses too little tragical interest, and too little historical splendour,

to be attractive, if handled in a serious manner throughout: hence Shakspeare has given to the comic characters belonging to the retinue of Prince Henry, the freest developement, and the half of the space is occupied by this constant interlude between the political events.

The two other historical plays taken from the English history are chronologically separated from this series: King John reigned nearly two centuries before Richard the Second, and between Richard the Third and Henry the Eighth comes the long reign of Henry the Seventh, which Shakspeare justly passed over as susceptible of no dramatic interest. However, these two plays may in some measure be considered as the Prologue and the Epilogue to the other eight. In *King John*, all the political and national motives which play so great a part in the following pieces are already indicated: wars and treaties with France; a usurpation and the tyrannical actions which it draws after it; the influence of the clergy, the factions of the nobles. *Henry the Eighth* again shows us the transition to another age; the policy of modern Europe, a refined court life under a voluptuous monarch, the dangerous situation of favourites who are themselves precipitated after they have assisted in effecting the fall of others; in a word, despotism under milder forms, but not less unjust and cruel. By the prophecies on the birth of Elizabeth, Shakspeare has in some degree brought his great poem on the English history down to his own time, at least as far as such recent events could be yet handled with security. With this view probably, he composed the two plays

of *King John* \* and *Henry the Eighth* at a later period, as an addition to the others.

In *King John* the political and warlike events are dressed out with solemn pomp, for the very reason that they possess but little true grandeur. The falsehood and selfishness of the monarch are evident in the style of the Manifesto. Conventional dignity is most indispensable where personal dignity is wanting. The bastard Faulconbridge is the witty interpreter of this language; he ridicules the secret springs of politics without disapproving of them, for he owns to himself that he is endeavouring to make his fortune by similar means, and wishes rather to belong to the deceivers than the deceived, as in his view of the world there is no other choice. His litigation with his brother respecting the succession of his pretended father, by which he effects his acknowledgment at court as natural son of the most chivalrous King of England, Richard Cœur de Lion, forms a very entertaining and original prelude in the play itself. Amidst so many disguises of real sentiments and so much insincerity of expression, when the Poet shows us human nature without a veil, and allows us to take deep views of the innermost recesses of the mind, the impression produced is so much the more deep and powerful. The short scene in which John calls on Hubert to remove out

\* I mean the piece with this title in the collection of his works. There is an older *King John*, in two parts, of which the former is a re-cast:—perhaps a juvenile work of Shakspeare, though not hitherto acknowledged as such by the English critics. See the disquisition appended to this Lecture.



of the way Arthur, his young rival, for the possession of the throne, is superlatively masterly; the cautious criminal hardly ventures to say to himself what he wishes the other to do. The tender and amiable Prince Arthur becomes a sacrifice of unprincipled ambition; his fate excites the warmest sympathy. When Hubert threatens to put out his eyes by a hot iron, and is softened by his prayers, our compassion would almost be too powerful for us were it not sweetened by the pleasing innocence of the childish speeches of Arthur. Constantia's maternal despair on the imprisonment of her son is also of the highest beauty; and even the last moments of John, an unjust and feeble prince whom we can neither respect nor admire, are portrayed in such a manner, that they extinguish our discontent against him, and fill us with serious considerations on the arbitrary deeds and the inevitable fate of mortals.

In *Richard the Second*, Shakspeare exhibits to us a noble kingly nature, at first obscured by levity and the errors of an unbridled youth, and afterwards purified by misfortune and rendered more highly and splendidly illustrious. When he has lost the love and reverence of his subjects, and is on the point of losing also his throne, he then feels with painful inspiration the elevated vocation of the kingly dignity and its prerogatives over personal merit and changeable institutions. When the earthly crown has fallen from off his head, he first appears as a king whose innate nobility no humiliation can annihilate. This is felt by a poor groom:

he is shocked that his master's favourite horse should have carried the proud Bolingbroke at his coronation; he visits the captive king in the prison, and shames the desertion of the great. The political history of the deposition is represented with extraordinary knowledge of the world;—the ebb of fortune on the one hand, and the swelling tide on the other, which carries every thing along with it; while Bolingbroke acts as a king, and his adherents behave towards him as if he really were so, he still continues to give out that he comes with an armed band merely for the sake of demanding his birth-right and the removal of abuses. The usurpation has been long completed before the word is pronounced, and the thing publicly avowed. The old John of Gaunt is a model of chivalrous truth:—he stands there like a pillar of the olden time which he has outlived. His son, Henry the Fourth, was altogether unlike him: this character is admirably supported throughout the three pieces in which he appears. We see in it that mixture of hardness, moderation, and prudence, which in fact enabled him to secure himself on the throne that he had violently usurped; but without openness, without true cordiality, and incapable of noble ebullitions, he was so little able to render his government beloved, that the deposed Richard was even wished back again.

The first part of *Henry the Fourth* is particularly brilliant in the serious scenes, from the contrast between two young heroes, Prince Henry and Percy with the characteristic name of Hotspur.

All the amiability and attractiveness is certainly on the side of the Prince; however familiar he makes himself with bad company, we can never mistake him for one of them; the ignoble touches but does not contaminate him, and his wildest freaks appear merely as witty tricks by which his restless mind sought to burst through the inactivity to which he was constrained; for on the first occasion which wakes him out of this unruly levity, he distinguishes himself without effort in the most chivalrous manner. Percy's boisterous valour is not without a mixture of rude manners, arrogance, and boyish obstinacy; but these errors, which prepare for him an early death, cannot disfigure the majestic image of his noble youth: we are carried along by his fire at the very moment we are censuring him. Why so formidable a revolt against an unpopular and properly an illegitimate prince was not attended with success, has been admirably shown by Shakspeare: the superstitious imaginations of Glendower respecting himself, the effeminacy of young Mortimer, the ungovernable disposition of Percy who will listen to no prudent counsel, the want of determination of his older friends, the want of unity of motive and plan, are all characterised by traits of the most delicate description, which yet however it is impossible to mistake. After Percy has left the scene, the splendour of the enterprise is, it is true, at an end; there remain only subordinate participators who are reduced to subjection by Henry the Fourth, more by policy than warlike achievements. To overcome this sterility of subject, Shakspeare was

obliged to employ great art in the second part of the play, as he never allowed himself to adorn history in an arbitrary manner, more than the dramatic form rendered indispensably requisite. The piece is opened by confused accounts from the field of battle; the powerful impression of Percy's fall, the name and fame of whom was peculiarly adapted to be the watchword of a bold enterprize, make him in some degree an acting personage after his death. In the last acts we are occupied by the gnawings of conscience of the dying King, his uneasiness from the behaviour of the Prince, and the clearing up of the misunderstanding between father and son, which give rise to several affecting scenes. All this, however, would still be insufficient to fill the stage, if the serious events were not interrupted by a comedy which runs through both parts of the play, which is enriched from time to time with new figures, and which first comes to its catastrophe at the conclusion of the whole, namely, when Henry the Fifth, immediately after ascending the throne, banishes to a due distance the companions of his youthful extravagance, who had promised to themselves the highest favour from him.

Falstaff is the summit of Shakspeare's comic invention. He has continued this character throughout three plays, and exhibited him in every variety of situation without exhausting himself; the figure is drawn so definitely and individually, that to the mere reader it affords the complete impression of a personal acquaintance. Falstaff is the most agreeable and entertaining knave that ever was portrayed.



His contemptible qualities are not disguised : old, lecherous, and dissolute; corpulent beyond measure, and always attentive to cherish his body by eating, drinking, and sleeping; constantly in debt, and every thing but conscientious in the choice of the means by which money is to be procured; a cowardly soldier, and a lying braggart; a flatterer to the face, and a satirist behind the backs of his friends, and yet we are never disgusted with him. We see that his tender care of himself is without any mixture of malice towards others; he will only not be disturbed in the pleasing repose of his sensuality, and this he obtains through the activity of his understanding. Always on the alert, and good-humoured, ever ready to crack jokes on others, and to enter into those of which he is himself the subject, so that he justly boasts he is not only witty himself, but the cause of wit in others, he is an admirable companion for youthful idleness and levity. Under a helpless exterior, he conceals an extremely acute mind; he has always some dexterous turn at command whenever any of his free jokes begin to give displeasure; he is shrewd in his distinctions, between those from whom he has favours to solicit, and those over whom he may assume a familiar ascendancy. He is so convinced that the part which he plays can only pass under the cloak of wit, that even when alone, he is never altogether serious, but gives the drollest colouring to his love intrigues, his relations with others, and his sensual philosophy. Witness his inimitable soliloquies on honour, on the influence of wine on bravery, his descriptions of the

beggarly vagabonds whom he enlisted, of Justice Shallow, &c. Falstaff has a whole court of amusing caricatures about him, who make their appearance by turns, without ever throwing him into the shade. The adventure in which the Prince, under the disguise of a robber, compels him to give up the spoil which he had just taken, the scene where the two act the part of the King and the Prince ; Falstaff's behaviour in the field, his mode of raising recruits, his patronage of Justice Shallow, which afterwards takes such an unfortunate turn :—all this forms a series of characteristical scenes of the most original description, full of pleasantry, and full of nice and ingenious observation, scenes such as could only find a place in a historical play like the present.

Several of the comic parts of Henry the Fourth are continued in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This piece is said to have been composed by Shakspeare, in compliance with the request of Queen Elizabeth\* who admired the character of Falstaff, and wished to see him exhibited once more, and in love. In love, properly speaking, Falstaff could not be ; but he could pretend that he was for other purposes, and at all events imagine that he was the object of love. He pays his court here, as a

\* We know with certainty, that it was acted before the Queen. Many local descriptions of Windsor and its neighbourhood, and an allusion in which the Order of the Garter is very poetically celebrated, make it credible that the play was destined to be first represented at the palace of Windsor, where the Knights of the Garter have their hall of meeting on the occasion of some festival of the Order.

favoured Knight, to two married ladies, who lay their heads together to listen in appearance to his addresses, for the sake of making him the subject of their just mirth. The whole plan of the intrigue is therefore derived from the ordinary circle of comedy, but yet interwoven in a very rich and artificial manner with another love affair. The circumstance which has been so much admired in Molière's school of women, that a jealous individual should be made the constant confidant of the progress of his rival, had already been introduced into this play, and certainly with much more probability. Yet I would not be understood to maintain that this was invented by Shakspeare: it is one of those circumstances which must almost be considered as the common good of comedy, and every thing depends on the delicacy and humour with which they are executed. That Falstaff should fall so repeatedly into the snare gives us a less advantageous opinion of his understanding than we had from the foregoing pieces; but it will not be considered improbable, when once we admit of the first infatuation on which the whole piece is founded, namely, that he believes himself qualified to inspire a passion. This leads him, notwithstanding his age, his corpulency, and his dislike of personal inconveniences and dangers, to venture on an undertaking which requires the boldness and activity of youth; and the situations occasioned by this infatuation are droll beyond all description. Of all the pieces of Shakspeare, this approaches the most to the species of pure comedy: it is altogether confined to the English manners of that day, and to

domestic relations; the characters are almost all comic, and the dialogue, with the exception of a couple of short love scenes, is written in prose. But we see that it was a principle of Shakspeare to make none of his compositions a mere imitation of the prosaic world, and to strip them of all poetical decoration: he has elevated the conclusion of the comedy by a wonderful intermixture, which suited the place where it was probably first represented. A popular superstition is made the means of a fanciful mystification \* of Falstaff; disguised as the Ghost of a Hunter who, with ragged horns, wanders about in the woods of Windsor, he is to wait for his frolicsome mistress; in this plight he is surprised by a chorus of boys and girls disguised like fairies, who, agreeably to the popular belief, are holding their midnight dances, and who pinch and torture him during their elegant songs. This is the last affront put upon Falstaff; and with this contrivance the conclusion of the second love affair is made in a most ingenious manner to depend.

*King Henry the Fifth* is visibly the favourite hero of Shakspeare in the English history: he portrays him endowed with every chivalrous and kingly virtue; open, sincere, affable, yet still disposed to innocent raillery as a sort of reminiscence of his youth, in the intervals between his dangerous and renowned achievements. To bring his life after his ascent to the crown on the stage was, however,

\* This word is French; but it has lately been adopted by some English writers.—TRANS.



attended with great difficulty. The conquests in France were the only distinguished event of his reign ; and war is much more an epic than a dramatic object. For wherever men act in masses against each other, the appearance of chance can never wholly be avoided ; and it is the business of the drama to exhibit to us determinations which proceed with a certain necessity from the reciprocal relations of the different individuals, their characters and passions. In several of the Grecian tragedies, it is true, combats and battles are exhibited, that is, the preparations for them and their results ; and in historical plays war, as the *ultima ratio regum*, cannot altogether be excluded. Still, however, if we would have dramatic interest, it must only be the means by which something else is accomplished, and not the last aim and substance of the whole. For instance, in *Macbeth*, the battles which are announced at the very beginning merely serve to heighten the renown of Macbeth and to fire his ambition ; and the combats which take place towards the conclusion, before the eyes of the spectator, bring on the destruction of the tyrant. It is the very same in the Roman pieces, in the most of those taken from English history, and wherever Shakspeare has introduced war in a dramatic concatenation. With great insight into the essence of his art he never paints the fortune of war as a blind deity who sometimes favours the one and sometimes the other ; without going into the details of the art of war, though he sometimes however ventures on this, he allows us to anticipate

the result from the qualities of the general, and their influence on the minds of the soldiers; sometimes he exhibits the issue in the light of a higher will without laying claim to our belief in miracles: the consciousness of a just cause and reliance on the protection of Heaven give courage to the one party, while the presage of a curse hanging over their undertaking weighs down the other.\* In *Henry the Fifth* no opportunity was afforded Shakspeare of adopting the last mentioned course, namely, rendering the issue of the war dramatic; but he has availed himself of the first with peculiar care.—Before the battle of Agincourt he paints in the most lively colours the light-minded impatience of the French leaders for the moment of battle, which to them seemed infallibly the moment of victory; on the other hand, he paints the uneasiness of the English King and his army from their desperate situation, coupled with the firm determination, if they are to fall, at least to fall with honour. He applies this as a general contrast between the French and English national characters; a contrast which betrays a partiality for his own nation, certainly excusable in a poet, especially when he is backed

\* Æschylus with equal wisdom, in the uniformly warlike tragedy of the *Seven before Thebes*, has given to the Theban chiefs foresight, determination, and presence of mind; to their adversaries, arrogant audacity. Hence all the combats, excepting that between Eteocles and Polynices, turn out in favour of the former. The paternal curse, and the blindness to which it gives rise, carry headlong the two brothers to the unnatural strife in which they both fall by the hands of each other.—See vol. i. page 110.

with such a glorious document as that of the memorable battle in question. He has surrounded the general events of the war with a fulness of individual, characteristic, and even sometimes comic features. A heavy Scotchman, a hot Irishman, a well-meaning, honourable, but pedantic Welchman, all speaking in their peculiar dialects, are intended to show us that the warlike genius of Henry did not merely carry the English with him, but also the other natives of the two islands, who were either not yet fully united or in no degree subject to him. Several good for nothing associates of Falstaff among the dregs of the army either afford an opportunity for proving the strict discipline under Henry, or are sent home in disgrace. But all this variety still seemed to the poet insufficient to animate a play of which the object was a conquest, and nothing but a conquest. He has therefore tacked a prologue (in the technical language of that day a chorus) to the beginning of each act. These prologues, which unite epic pomp and solemnity with lyrical sublimity, and among which the description of the two camps before the battle of Agincourt forms a most admirable night-piece, are intended to keep the spectators constantly in mind that the peculiar grandeur of the actions there described cannot be developed on a narrow stage, and that they must supply the deficiencies of the representation from their own imaginations. As the subject was not properly dramatic, in the form also Shakspeare chose rather to wander beyond the bounds of the species, and to sing, as a poetical herald, what he could not repre-

sent to the eye, than to cripple the progress of the action by putting long descriptions in the mouths of the persons of the drama. The confession of the poet that "four or five most vile and ragged foils, right ill disposed, can only disgrace the name of Agincourt" (a scruple which he has overlooked in the occasion of many other great battles, and among others of that of Philippi) brings us here naturally to the question how far, generally speaking, it may be suitable and adviseable to represent wars and battles on the stage. The Greeks have uniformly renounced them: as in the whole of their theatrical system they proceeded on ideas of grandeur and dignity, a feeble and petty imitation of the unattainable would have appeared insupportable in their eyes. All fighting with them was consequently merely recounted. The principle of the romantic dramatic poets was altogether different: their wonderful pictures were infinitely larger than their theatrical means of visible execution; they were every where obliged to count on the willing imagination of the spectators, and consequently they also relied on them in this point. It is certainly laughable enough that a handful of awkward warriors in mock armour, by means of two or three swords, with which we clearly see they take especial care not to do the slightest injury to one another, should decide the fate of mighty kingdoms. But the opposite extreme is still much worse. If we in reality succeed in exhibiting the tumult of a great battle, the storming of a fort, and the like, in a manner any way calculated to deceive the eye, the power of



these sensible impressions is so great that they render the spectator incapable of bestowing that attention which a poetical work of art demands; and thus the essential is sacrificed to the accessory. We have learned from experience, that whenever cavalry combats are introduced the men soon become secondary personages beside the four-footed players.\* Fortunately, in Shakspeare's time, the art of converting the yielding boards of the theatre into a riding course had not yet been invented. He tells the spectators in the first prologue in *Henry the Fifth*:—

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs in the receiving earth.

When Richard the Third utters the famous exclamation,—

A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!

it is no doubt inconsistent to see him both before and afterwards constantly fighting on foot. It is however better, perhaps, that the poet and player should by overpowering impressions dispose us to forget this, than by literal exactness to expose themselves to external interruptions. With all the

\* The Greeks, it is true, brought horses on the tragic stage, but only in solemn processions, not in the wild disorder of a fight. Agamemnon and Pallas, in *Æschylus*, make their appearance drawn in a chariot with four horses. But their theatres were built on a scale very different from ours.

disadvantages which I have mentioned, Shakspeare and several Spanish poets have contrived to derive such great beauties from the immediate representation of war that I cannot bring myself to wish they had abstained from it. A theatrical manager of the present day will have a middle course to follow: his art must, in an especial manner, be directed to make what he shows us appear only as separate groupes of a picture which cannot be overlooked; he must convince the spectators that the main action takes place behind the stage; and for this purpose he has easy means at his command in the nearer or more remote sound of warlike music and the din of arms.

However much Shakspeare celebrates the French conquest of Henry, still he has not omitted to hint to us, after his way, the secret springs of this undertaking. Henry was in want of foreign war to secure himself on the throne; the clergy also wished to keep him employed abroad, and made an offer of rich contributions to prevent the passing of a law which would have deprived them of the half of their revenues. His learned bishops are consequently as ready to prove to him his indisputed right to the crown of France as he is to allow his conscience to be tranquillized by them. They prove that the Salic law is not, and never was, applicable to France; and the matter is treated in a more succinct and convincing manner than such subjects usually are in manifestoes. After his renowned battles Henry wished to secure his conquests by marriage with a French princess; all that has reference to

this is intended for irony in the play. The fruit of this union, from which two nations promised to themselves such happiness in future, was that very feeble Henry the Sixth, under whom every thing was so miserably lost. It must not therefore be imagined that it was without the knowledge and will of the poet that a heroic drama turns out a comedy in his hands, and ends in the manner of comedy with a marriage of convenience.

The three parts of *Henry the Sixth*, as I have already remarked, were much earlier composed than the preceding pieces. Shakspeare's choice fell first on this period of English history so full of misery and horrors of every kind, because the pathetic is naturally more suitable to a young poetical mind than the characteristic. We do not yet find here the whole maturity of his genius; but we certainly find its whole strength. Careless respecting the apparent unconnectedness of contemporary events, he bestows small attention on preparation and developement: all the figures follow in rapid succession, and announce themselves emphatically for what we ought to take them; from scenes of which the effect is sufficiently agitating to form the catastrophe of a less extensive plan, the poet hurries us perpetually on to still more dreadful catastrophes. The First Part contains only the beginning of the parties of the White and Red Rose, under which blooming colours such bloody deeds were afterwards performed; the varying results of the war in France principally fill the stage. The wonderful saviour of her country, Joan of Arc, is portrayed by Shak-

speare with the partiality of an Englishman : yet he at first leaves it doubtful whether she has not in reality a heavenly mission ; she appears in the pure glory of virgin heroism ; she wins over, and this circumstance is of the poet's invention, the Duke of Burgundy to the French cause by her supernatural eloquence ; afterwards corrupted by vanity and luxury she has recourse to hellish fiends, and comes to a miserable end. To her is opposed Talbot, a rough iron warrior, who moves us the more powerfully, as in the moment when he is threatened with inevitable death we see all his care tenderly directed to save his son, who performs his first deeds of arms under his eye. After Talbot has in vain sacrificed himself, and the Maid of Orleans has fallen into the hands of the English, the French provinces are completely lost by an impolitic marriage ; and with this the piece ends. The conversation between the aged Mortimer in prison and Richard Plantagenet, afterwards Duke of York, contains an exposition of the claims of the latter to the throne : considered by itself it is a beautiful tragic elegy.

In the Second Part, the events more particularly prominent are the murder of the honest protector Gloster, and its consequences ; the death of Cardinal Beaufort ; the parting of the Queen from her favourite Suffolk, and his death by the hands of savage pirates ; then the insurrection of Jack Cade under an assumed name, and at the instigation of the Duke of York. The short scene where Cardinal Beaufort, who is tormented by his conscience on account of the murder of Gloster, is visited on his



death-bed by Henry the Sixth is sublime beyond all praise. Can any other poet be named who has drawn aside the curtain of eternity at the close of this life in such an overpowering and awful manner? And yet it is not mere horror with which we are filled, but solemn emotion; we have an exemplification of a blessing and curse in close proximity; the pious King is an image of the heavenly mercy which even in his last moments labours to enter into the soul of the sinner. The adulterous passion of Queen Margaret and Suffolk has been invested with tragical dignity by Shakspeare, and carefully removed from all ignoble ideas of a secondary nature. Without attempting to gloss over the crime of which both are guilty, without seeking to remove our disapprobation of this criminal love, he still, by the magic force of expression, contrives to excite in us a sympathy with their pain. In the insurrection of Cade he has portrayed the behaviour of a popular demagogue, the dreadful ludicrousness of the anarchical tumult of the people, with such convincing truth, that one would believe he was an eye-witness of many of the events of our age which, from ignorance of history, have been considered as without example.

The civil war begins only in the Second Part; in the Third he unfolds its whole destructive fury. The picture becomes gloomier and gloomier; and appears at last to be painted rather with blood than with colours. We see with horror that fury gives birth to fury, vengeance to vengeance; and that when all the bonds of human society are torn asun-

der, even noble nations become hardened to cruelty. The most bitter contempt falls to the lot of the unfortunate; no one affords that compassion to his enemy of which he will shortly himself stand in need. Their party is to all of them, family, country, and religion; their only springs of action. As York, whose ambition is coupled with noble qualities, prematurely perishes, the object of the whole contest is now either to support an imbecile King, or to place on the throne a luxurious monarch, who shortens the dear-bought possession by the gratification of an insatiable voluptuousness. For this the celebrated and magnanimous Warwick spends his chivalrous life; Clifford revenges the death of his father with blood-thirsty filial love; and Richard, for the elevation of his brother, practises those dark deeds by which he is soon after to pave the way to his own greatness. In the midst of the general ruin, of which he has been the innocent cause, King Henry appears like the powerless image of a saint, in whose wonderful efficacy no man any longer believes: he can only sigh and weep over the enormities which he witnesses. In his simplicity, however, the gift of prophecy is lent to this pious King: in the moment of his death, at the close of this great tragedy, he prophesies a still more dreadful tragedy with which futurity is pregnant, as distinguished for the poisonous wiles of cold-blooded wickedness as the former for deeds of savage fury.

The part of Richard the Third has become highly celebrated in England from its having been filled by excellent performers, and this has

naturally had an influence on the admiration of the piece itself: for many readers of Shakspeare stand in want of good interpreters of the poet to understand him properly. This admiration is certainly, in every respect, well founded, though I cannot help thinking there is an injustice in considering the three parts of *Henry the Sixth* as of small value compared with *Richard the Third*. These four plays were undoubtedly composed in succession, as is proved by the style and the spirit in the manner of handling the subject; the last is definitely announced in the one which precedes it, and is also full of references to it: the same views run through the series; in a word, the whole make together only one single work. Even the deep characterization of Richard is by no means an exclusive advantage of the piece which bears his name: his character is very distinctly drawn in the two last parts of *Henry the Sixth*; nay even his first speeches lead us already to form the most unfavourable prognostications respecting him. He lowers, obliquely like a dark thunder-cloud on the horizon, which gradually approaches nearer and nearer, and first pours out the elements of devastation with which it is charged when it hangs over the heads of mortals. Two of the most significant monologues of Richard, and which enable us to draw the most important conclusions respecting his constitution of mind, are to be found in *The Last Part of Henry the Sixth*. Respecting the value and the justice of actions those who are impelled to them by passions may be blind, but wickedness cannot mistake its own essence:

Richard, as well as Iago, is a villain with full consciousness. That they should say this in so many words, is not perhaps in human nature: but the poet has the right in soliloquies to lend a voice to the most hidden thoughts, otherwise the form of the monologue would, generally speaking, be censurable.\* Richard's deformity is the expression of his internal malice, and perhaps in part the effect of it: for where is the ugliness that would not be softened by benevolence and openness? He however considers it as an iniquitous neglect of nature, which justifies him in taking his revenge on that human society from which it is the means of excluding him. Hence these sublime lines:

And this word love, which graybeards call desire,  
Be resident in men like one another,  
And not in me. I am myself alone.

Wickedness is nothing but an egotism designedly unconscientious; however it can never do altogether without the form of morality, as this is the law of all thinking beings,—it must seek to found its depraved way of acting on something like principles. Although Richard is thoroughly acquainted with the blackness of his mind and his hellish mission, he yet endeavours to justify this to himself by a sophism: the happiness of being beloved is denied

\* What happens however in so many tragedies, where a person is made to declare himself a villain to his confidants, is most decidedly unnatural. He will announce his way of thinking, not however under damning names, but as something that is understood of itself, and is equally approved of by others.



to him; what then remains to him but the happiness of ruling? All that stands in the way of this must be removed. This envy of the enjoyment of love is so much the more natural in Richard, as his brother Edward, who besides preceded him in the possession of the crown, distinguished for the nobleness and beauty of his figure, was an almost irresistible conqueror of female hearts. Notwithstanding his pretended remuneration Richard places his chief vanity in being able to please and win over the women, if not by his figure at least by his insinuating discourse. Shakspeare here shows us, with his accustomed acuteness of observation, that human nature, even when it is altogether decided in goodness or wickedness, is still subject to petty infirmities. Richard's most favourite entertainment is to ridicule others, and he possesses satirical wit in an eminent degree. He entertains at bottom a contempt for all mankind, as he is confident of his ability to deceive them whether they may be his instruments or adversaries. In hypocrisy he is particularly fond of using religious forms, as if actuated by a desire of profaning in the service of hell the religion of which he had inwardly abjured the blessings. So much for the main features of Richard's character. The play named after him embraces also the latter half of the reign of Edward IV., in the whole a period of eight years. It exhibits all the machinations by which Richard obtained the throne, and the deeds which he perpetrated to secure himself in its possession, which lasted however only two years. Shakspeare intended that terror rather

than compassion should prevail throughout this tragedy: he has rather gone out of the way of the pathetic scenes which he had at command, than sought after them. Of all the sacrifices to Richard's lust of power, Clarence alone is put to death on the stage: his dream excites a deep horror, and proves the omnipotence of the poet's fancy: his conversation with the murderers is powerfully agitating; but the earlier crimes of Clarence merited death, although not from his brother. The most innocent and unspotted sacrifices are the two Princes: we see but little of them, and their murder is merely related. Anne disappears without our learning any thing farther respecting her: she has shown a weakness almost incredible in marrying the murderer of her husband. The parts of Lord Rivers, and other friends of the Queen, are of too secondary a nature to excite a powerful sympathy; Hastings, from his triumph at the fall of his friend, forfeits all title to compassion; Buckingham is the satellite of the tyrant, who is afterwards consigned by him to the axe of the executioner. In the back-ground the widowed Queen Margaret appears, as the fury of the past who calls forth the curse on the future: every calamity, which her enemies draw down on each other is a cordial to her revengeful heart. Other female voices join, from time to time, in the lamentations and imprecations. But Richard is the soul or rather the dæmon, of the whole tragedy. He fulfils the promise which he formerly made of leading the murderous Macchiavel to school. Besides the uniform aversion with which he inspires

us, he occupies us in the greatest variety of ways by his profound skill in dissimulation, his wit, his prudence, his presence of mind, his quick activity, and his valour. He fights at last against Richmond like a desperado, and dies the honourable death of the hero on the field of battle. Shakspeare could not change this historical issue, and yet it is by no means satisfactory to our moral feelings, as Lessing, when speaking of a German play on the same subject, has very judiciously remarked. How has Shakspeare solved this difficulty? By a wonderful invention he opens a prospect into the other world, and shows us Richard in his last moments already branded with the stamp of reprobation. We see Richard and Richmond in the night before the battle sleeping in their tents; the spirits of those murdered by the tyrant ascend in succession, and pour out their curses against him, and their blessings on his adversary. These apparitions are properly merely the dreams of the two generals rendered visible. It is no doubt contrary to sensible probability that their tents should only be separated by such a small space; but Shakspeare could reckon on poetical spectators, who were ready to take the breadth of the stage for the distance between two camps, if by such a favour they were to be recompensed by beauties of so sublime a nature as this series of spectres and the soliloquy of Richard on his awaking. The catastrophe of *Richard the Third* is, in respect of external events, very like that of *Macbeth*: we have only to compare the complete difference of the manner of treat-

ment to be convinced that Shakspeare has observed, in the most accurate manner, poetical justice in the genuine sense of the word, namely, where it signifies the revelation of the invisible blessing or curse which hangs over human sentiments and actions.

Although the four last pieces of the historical series paint later events, yet the plays of *Henry the Fourth and Fifth* have in costume and tone, a much more modern appearance. This is partly owing to the number of comic scenes; for the comic must always not only be founded in national, but in contemporary manners. Shakspeare however seems also to have had the same design in the serious part. Bloody revolutions and devastations of civil war appear to posterity as a relapse into an earlier and more uncultivated condition of society, or they are in reality accompanied by such a relapse into unbridled savageness. If therefore the propensity of a young poetical mind to remove its object to a wonderful distance has had an influence on the style in which *Henry the Sixth* and *Richard the Third* are conceived, Shakspeare has been rightly guided by his instinct. As it is peculiar to the epic poem to paint the races of men in times past as colossal in strength of body and resolution, so in these plays, in the voices of a Talbot, a Warwick, a Clifford, and others, we imagine we hear the trumpet of foreign or civil war. The contest of the houses of York and Lancaster was the last raging of feudal independence: for it was the cause of the great, and not of the people, who were only dragged by the former along with them into the divisions. Afterwards the



separate was swallowed up in the whole, and no one could any longer, like a Warwick, be a maker of kings. Shakspeare was as profound a historian as a poet; when we compare his *Henry the Eighth* with the preceding pieces, we see distinctly that the English nation during the long peaceable and economical reign of Henry the Seventh, whether from the exhaustion which was the fruit of the civil wars, or from more general European influences, had made a sudden transition from the powerful confusion of the middle age, to the regular tameness of modern times. *Henry the Eighth* has therefore somewhat of a prosaical appearance; for Shakspeare, as an artist, subjected himself always to the quality of his materials. If others of his works, in elevation of fancy, in energy of pathos and character, tower far above this, we have here on the other hand an opportunity of admiring his nice powers of discrimination, and his perfect knowledge of courts and the world. What management was requisite to represent before the eyes of the queen\* subjects of such a delicate nature, and in which she was personally so nearly concerned, without however approaching too near to the truth! He has un-

\* It is quite clear that *Henry the Eighth* was written while Elizabeth was still in life. We know that Ben Jonson, in the reign of King James, brought the piece with additional pomp again on the stage, and took the liberty of making several changes and additions. Without doubt, the prophecy respecting James the First is due to Ben Jonson: it would only have displeased Elizabeth, and is so ill introduced that we at once recognize in it a foreign interpolation.

masked the tyrannical king, and exhibited him to the intelligent as he actually was: haughty and obstinate, voluptuous and without feeling, extravagant in conferring favours, and revengeful under the pretence of justice; and yet the picture is so dexterously handled that a daughter might take it for favourable. The legitimacy of Elizabeth's birth depended on the invalidity of the first marriage of Henry, and Shakspeare has placed the proceedings respecting his separation from Catharine of Arragon in a very doubtful light. We see clearly that Henry's scruples of conscience are no other than the beauty of Anne Boleyn. Catharine is, properly speaking, the heroine of the piece; she excites the warmest sympathy from her virtue, her defenceless misery, her soft but firm opposition, and her dignified resignation. After her, the fall of Cardinal Wolsey constitutes the principal part of the business. Henry's whole reign was not adapted for dramatic poetry. It would have merely been a repetition of the same scenes: the repudiation, or the execution of his wives, and the fall of his most estimable servants into disfavour, which was usually soon followed by death. Of all for which Henry's life was distinguished, Shakspeare has given us sufficient specimens. But as there is, properly speaking, no division in the history where he breaks off, we must excuse him for giving us a flattery towards the great Elizabeth for a fortunate catastrophe. The piece ends with the general joy at the birth of that Princess, and with prophecies of the felicity which she was afterwards to enjoy or to diffuse. It was

only by such a turn that the hazardous liberty of the remainder of the composition could have passed with impunity: Shakspeare was not certainly himself deceived respecting this theatrical delusion. The true conclusion is the death of Catharine, which he has also therefore placed earlier than was conformable to history.

Thus I have now gone through all the unquestionably genuine works of Shakspeare. I have carefully abstained from all indefinite eulogies, which merely serve to prove a disproportion betwixt the feeling and the capability of expressing it. To many the above observations will appear too diffuse for the object and plan of these lectures; to others they will perhaps seem unsatisfactory. I shall be satisfied if they place those readers who are not yet familiar with the poet in the right point of view, and pave the way for a solid knowledge, and if they recall to the minds of intelligent critics some of those thoughts which have occurred to themselves.

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## APPENDIX

*Respecting the Pieces said to be falsely attributed to Shakspeare.*

THE commentators of Shakspeare, in their attempts to deprive him of parts of his works, or even of whole pieces, have for the most part displayed very

little of the true critical spirit. Pope, as is well known, was strongly disposed to declare whole scenes for interpolations of the players; but his opinions were not much listened to. However, Steevens still accedes to the opinion of Pope, respecting the apparition of the ghosts and of Jupiter in *Cymbeline*, while Posthumus is sleeping in the dungeon. But Posthumus finds on waking, a tablet on his breast, with a prophecy on which the *denouement* of the piece depends. Is it to be imagined that Shakspeare would require of his spectators the belief in a wonder without a visible cause? Is Posthumus to dream this tablet with the prophecy? But these gentlemen do not descend to this objection. The verses which the apparitions deliver do not appear to them good enough to be Shakspeare's. I imagine I can discover why the poet has not given them more of the splendour of diction. They are the aged parents and brothers of Posthumus, who, from concern for his fate, return from the world below: they ought consequently to speak the language of a more simple olden time, and their voices ought also to appear as a feeble sound of wailing, when contrasted with the thundering oracular language of Jupiter. For this reason Shakspeare chose a syllabic measure which was very common before his time, but which was then getting out of fashion, though it still continued to be frequently used especially in translations of classical poets. In some such manner might the shades express themselves in the then existing translations of Homer and Virgil. The speech of Jupiter is on



the other hand majestic, and in form and style bears a complete resemblance to the sonnets of Shakspeare. Nothing but the incapacity of appreciating the views of the poet, and the perspective observed by him, could lead them to stumble at this passage.

Pope would willingly have declared the *Winter's Tale* spurious, one of the noblest creations of the equally bold and lovely fancy of Shakspeare. Why? I should suppose on account of the ship landing in Bohemia, and the chasm of sixteen years between the third and fourth acts, which Time as a prologue entreats us to overleap.

*The Three Parts of Henry the Sixth* are now at length admitted to be Shakspeare's. Theobald, Warburton, and lastly Farmer, affirmed that they were not Shakspeare's. In this case, we might well ask them to point out the other works of the unknown author, who was capable of inventing the noble death scenes of Talbot, Suffolk, Beaufort, and York, and so many other scenes. The assertion is so ridiculous, that in this case *Richard the Third* might also not be Shakspeare's, as it is linked in the most immediate manner to the three other pieces, both by the subject, and the spirit and manner of handling.

All the editors, with the exception of Capell, are unanimous in rejecting *Titus Andronicus* as unworthy of Shakspeare, though they always allow it to be printed with the other pieces, as the scape-goat, as it were, of their abusive criticism. The correct method in such an investigation is first to examine into the external grounds, evidences, &c. and to

weigh their worth ; and then to adduce the internal reasons derived from the quality of the work. The critics of Shakspeare follow a course directly the reverse of this ; they set out with a preconceived opinion against a piece, and seek, in justification of this opinion, to render the historical grounds suspicious, and to set them aside. *Titus Andronicus* is to be found in the first folio edition of Shakspeare's works, which it is known was conducted by Heming and Condell, for many years his friends and fellow-managers of the same theatre. Is it possible to persuade ourselves that they would not have known if a piece in their repertory did or did not actually belong to Shakspeare ? And are we to lay to the charge of these honourable men a designed fraud in this single case, when we know that they did not show themselves so very desirous of scraping every thing together which went by the name of Shakspeare, but, as it appears, merely gave those plays of which they had manuscripts in hand ? Yet the following circumstance is still stronger. George Meres, a contemporary and admirer of Shakspeare, mentions *Titus Andronicus* in an enumeration of his works, in the year 1598. Meres was personally acquainted with the poet, and so very intimately, that the latter read over to him his sonnets before they were printed. I cannot conceive that all the critical scepticism in the world would be sufficient to get over such a testimony.

This tragedy, it is true, is framed according to a false idea of the tragic, which by an accumulation of cruelties and enormities, degenerates into the hor.

rible, and yet leaves no deep impression behind : the story of Tereus and Philomela is heightened and overcharged under other names, and mixed up with the repast of Atreus and Thyeste, and many other incidents. In detail there is no want of beautiful lines, bold images, nay, even features which betray the peculiar conception of Shakspeare. Among these we may reckon the joy of the treacherous Moor at the blackness and ugliness of his child begot in adultery ; and in the compassion of *Titus Andronicus*, grown childish through grief, for a fly which had been struck dead, and his rage afterwards when he imagines he discovers in it his black enemy, we recognize the future poet of *Lear*. Are the critics afraid that Shakspeare's fame would be injured, were it established that in his early youth he ushered into the world a feeble and immature work ? Was Rome the less the conqueror of the world, because Remus could leap over its first walls ? Let any one place himself in Shakspeare's situation at the commencement of his career. He found only a few indifferent models, and yet these met with the most favourable reception, because men are never difficult to please in the novelty of an art before their taste has become fastidious from choice and abundance. Must not this situation have had its influence on him before he learned to make higher demands on himself, and by digging deeper in his own mind, discovered the richest veins of a noble metal ? It is even highly probable that he must have made several failures before getting into the right path. Genius is in a certain sense infallible, and

has nothing to learn ; but art is to be learned, and must be acquired by practice and experience. In Shakspeare's acknowledged works we find hardly any traces of his apprenticeship, and yet an apprenticeship he certainly had. This every artist must have, and especially in a period where he has not before him the example of a school already formed. I consider it as extremely probable, that Shakspeare began to write for the theatre at a much earlier period than the one which is generally stated, namely, not till after the year 1590. It appears that, as early as the year 1584, when only 20 years of age, he had left his paternal home and repaired to London. Can we imagine that such an active head would remain idle for six whole years without making any attempt to emerge by his talents from an uncongenial situation ? That in the dedication of the poem of *Venus and Adonis* he calls it " the first heir of his invention," proves nothing against the supposition. It was the first which he printed ; he might have composed it at an earlier period ; perhaps, also, he did not include theatrical labours, as they then possessed but little literary dignity. The earlier Shakspeare began to compose for the theatre, the less are we enabled to consider the immaturity and imperfection of a work as a proof of its spuriousness in opposition to historical evidence, if we only find in it prominent features of his mind. Several of the works rejected as spurious, may still have been produced in the period betwixt *Titus Andronicus*, and the earliest of the acknowledged pieces.



At last, Steevens published seven pieces ascribed to Shakspeare in two supplementary volumes. It is to be remarked, that they all appeared in print in Shakspeare's life-time, with his name prefixed at full length. They are the following :—

1. *Locrine*. The proofs of the genuineness of this piece are not altogether unambiguous; the grounds for doubt, on the other hand, are entitled to attention. However, this question is immediately connected with that respecting *Titus Andronicus*, and must be at the same time resolved in the affirmative or negative.

2. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. This piece was acknowledged by Dryden, but as a youthful work of Shakspeare. It is most undoubtedly his, and it has been admitted into several of the late editions. The supposed imperfections originate in the circumstance, that Shakspeare here handled a childish and extravagant romance of the old poet Gower, and was unwilling to drag the subject out of its proper sphere. Hence he even introduces Gower himself, and makes him deliver a prologue entirely in his antiquated language and versification. This power of assuming so foreign a manner is at least no proof of helplessness.

3. *The London Prodigal*. If we are not mistaken, Lessing pronounced this piece to be Shakspeare's, and wished to bring it on the German stage.

4. *The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling-street*. One of my literary friends, intimately acquainted with Shakspeare, was of opinion that the poet must

have wished to write a play for once in the style of Ben Jonson, and that in this way we must account for the difference between the present piece and his usual manner. To follow out this idea however would lead to a very nice critical investigation.

5. *Thomas Lord Cromwell.*
6. *Sir John Oldcastle—First Part.*
7. *A Yorkshire Tragedy.*

The three last pieces are not only unquestionably Shakspeare's, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and maturest works.—Steevens admits at last, in some degree, that they are Shakspeare's as well as the others, excepting *Lochrine*, but he speaks of all of them with great contempt, as quite worthless productions. His condemnatory sentence is not however in the slightest degree convincing, nor is it supported by critical acumen. I should like to see how such a critic would, of his own natural suggestion, have decided on Shakspeare's acknowledged master-pieces, and what he would have thought of praising in them, had the public opinion not imposed on him the duty of admiration. *Thomas Lord Cromwell* and *Sir John Oldcastle* are biographical dramas, and models in this species: the first is linked, from its subject, to *Henry the Eighth*, and the second to *Henry the Fifth*. The second part of *Oldcastle* is wanting; I know not whether a copy of the old edition has been discovered in England, or whether it is lost. *The Yorkshire Tragedy* is a tragedy in one act, a dramatised tale of murder: the tragical effect is overpowering, and it is extremely important

to see how poetically Shakspeare could handle such a subject.

There have been still farther ascribed to him: 1st. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, a comedy in one act, printed in Dodsley's old plays. This has certainly some appearances in its favour. It contains a merry landlord, who bears great similarity to the one in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. However, at all events, though an ingenious, it is but a hasty sketch. 2d. *The Accusation of Paris*. 3d. *The Birth of Merlin*. 4th. *Edward the Third*. 5th. *The Fair Emma*. 6th. *Mucedorus*. 7th. *Arden of Feversham*. I have never seen any of these, and cannot therefore say any thing respecting them. From the passages cited, I am led to conjecture that the subject of *Mucedorus* is the popular story of Valentine and Orson: a beautiful subject which Lope de Vega has also taken for a play. *Arden of Feversham* is said to be a tragedy on the story of a man, from whom the poet descended by the mother's side. If the quality of the piece is not too directly at variance with this claim, the circumstance would afford an additional probability in its favour. For such motives were not foreign to Shakspeare: he treated Henry the Seventh, who bestowed lands on his forefathers for services performed by them, with a visible partiality.

Of Shakspeare's share in *The two Noble Cousins* it will be the time to speak when I come to mention Fletcher's works.

It would be very instructive, if it could be proved that several earlier attempts of works, afterwards re-

written, proceeded from himself, and not from an unknown author. We should thus be best enabled to trace his developement as an artist. Of the older *King John*, in two parts (printed by Steevens among six old plays), this might probably be made out. That he sometimes came back to the same work is certian. We know with respect to *Hamlet*, for instance, that it was very gradually formed by him to its present perfect state.

Whoever takes from Shakspeare a play early ascribed to him, and confessedly belonging to his time, is unquestionably bound to answer, with some degree of probability, this question: who has then written it? Shakspeare's competitors in the dramatic walk are pretty well known, and if those of them who have even acquired a considerable name, a Lilly, a Marlow, a Heywood, are still so very far below him, we can hardly imagine that the author of a work, which rises so high beyond theirs, would have remained unknown.



## LECTURE XIII.

Two periods of the English theatre;—the first the most important.—The first conformation of the stage, and its advantages.—State of the histrionic art in Shakspeare's time.—Antiquities of dramatic literature.—Lilly, Marlow, Heywood.—Ben Jonson.—Criticism of his works.—Masks.—Beaumont and Fletcher.—General characterisation of these poets, and remarks on some of their pieces.—Massinger and other contemporaries of Charles the First.—Closing of the stage by the Puritans.—Revival of the stage under Charles the Second.—Depravity of taste and morals.—Dryden, Otway, and others.—Characterisation of the comic poets from Wycherley and Congreve to the middle of the eighteenth century.—Tragedies of the same period.—Rowe.—Addison's Cato.—Later pieces.—Familiar tragedy: Lillo.—Garriek.—Latest state.

**THE** great master of whom we have spoken in the preceding Lecture forms such a singular exception to the whole history of art, that we are compelled to assign a particular place to him. He owed hardly anything to his predecessors, and he has had the greatest influence on his successors: but no man has yet learned from him his secret. For two whole centuries, during which his countrymen have diligently employed themselves in the cultivation of every branch of science and art, by their own confession, he has not only never yet been surpassed, but he has left every dramatic poet at a great distance behind him.

In the sketch of a history of the English theatre which I am now to give, I shall be frequently obliged to return to Shakspeare. The dramatic literature of the English is very rich; they can boast of a considerable number of dramatic poets, who possessed in a distinguished degree the talent of original characterisation, and the means of theatrical effect. Their hands were not shackled by prejudices, by arbitrary rules, and by the anxious observance of conveniences. There has never been in England an academical court of taste; in art as in life, every man there decides for what pleases him best, or what is most suitable to his nature. Notwithstanding this liberty, their writers have not however been able to escape the influence of varying modes, and of the spirit of different ages.

We remain true to our principle of merely dwelling at length on what we consider as the highest efforts of poetry, and of taking brief views of all that merely occupies the second or third place.

The antiquities of the English theatre have been sufficiently cleared up by the English writers, and especially by Malone. The earliest dramatic attempts were here as well as elsewhere mysteries and moralities. Still however it would seem that the English distinguished themselves at an earlier period in these productions than other nations. It has been recorded in the History of the Council of Constance, that the English prelates, in one of the intervals between the sittings, entertained their other brethren with a spiritual play in Latin, such

as the latter were either entirely unacquainted with, or at least not in such perfection, (according to the simple ideas of art of those times). The beginning of a theatre, properly so called, cannot however be placed farther back than the reign of Elizabeth. *John Heywood*, the buffoon of Henry the Eighth, is considered as the oldest comic writer: the single *Interlude* under his name, published in Dodsley's collection, is in fact merely a dialogue, and not a drama. But *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, which was first acted about the year 1560, certainly deserves the name of a comedy. However antiquated in language and versification, it possesses unequivocal merit in the low comic. The whole plot turns on a lost needle, the finding of which is pursued with the utmost assiduity: the poverty of the persons of the drama, which this supposes, and the whole of their domestic condition, is very amusingly portrayed, and the part of a cunning beggar especially is drawn with much humour. The coarse comic of this piece bears a resemblance to that of the *Avocat Patelin*; yet the English play has not, like the French, been honoured with a revival on the stage in a new shape.

The history of the English theatre divides itself naturally into two periods. The first begins nearly about the time of the ascension of Elizabeth, and extends to about the end of the reign of Charles the First, when the Puritans gained the ascendancy, and effected the prohibition of all plays of whatsoever description. The shutting up of the theatres lasted thirteen years; and they were not again opened till

the restoration of Charles the Second. This interruption, the change which had taken place in the mean time on the general way of thinking and in manners, and lastly, the influence of the French literature which was then flourishing, gave quite a different character to the plays written afterwards. The works of the older school were indeed in part sought out, but the school itself was extinguished. I call the dramatical poets of the first epoch a school, in the sense in which it is taken in art, as with all their personal diversities we may still perceive on the whole a common direction in their productions. Independently also of the language or contemporary allusions, we should never be disposed to take a play of that school, though ignorant of its author, and the time when it was produced, for a production of the more modern period. The latter is susceptible of many subdivisions, but these may also be dispensed with. The talents of the authors, and the taste of the public, have fluctuated in all manner of directions, sometimes the most opposite, foreign influence has gained more and more the ascendancy, and, to express myself without circumlocution, the English theatre has in its progress become more and more destitute of character and independence. For a critic who seeks every where for originality, and who troubles himself much less about what has arisen from imitation, or the avoiding of imitation, the dramatic poets of the first period are by far the most important, although with the exception of Shakspeare they may be reproached with great defects and extravagances, and although



many of the moderns are distinguished for a more careful polish.

There are periods when the human mind makes all at once gigantic strides in an art previously almost unknown, as if during its long sleep it had been collecting strength for such an effort. The age of Elizabeth was in England such an epoch for dramatic poetry. This Queen, during her long reign, witnessed the first infantine attempts of the English theatre; and its most masterly productions. Shakspeare had a lively feeling of this general and rapid developement of qualities, not before called into exercise; in one of his sonnets he calls his age, *these time bettering days*. The predilection for the theatre prevailed to such a degree, that in a period of sixty years, under this and the following reign, seventeen play houses were built or fitted up in London, whereas the capital of the present day with twice the population\* is satisfied with two. No doubt they did not act every day, and several of these theatres were very small, and probably not much better fitted up than Marionette booths. Still however they served to call forth the fertility of those writers who possessed or supposed that they possessed, dramatic talents; for every theatre must have had its peculiar repertory, as the pieces were either not printed at all, or at least not till long after their composition, and as a single theatrical company was in the exclusive possession of the manuscript. However many feeble and lame productions

\* The author might almost have said six times.—TRANS.

might have, in this manner, been called forth, it was however impossible that such an extensive competition should not have been advantageous. Of all the different species of poetry the dramatic is the only one in which experience is necessary : and the failure of others is, for the man of talents, an experiment at their expense. Moreover, the exercise of this art requires vigorous determination, to which the great artist is often the least inclined, as in the execution he finds the greatest difficulty in satisfying himself ; while, on the other hand, his greatest enjoyment consists in embodying in his mind the beloved creation of his imagination. It is therefore fortunate for him when the importunity of those who, with trifling means, venture on this difficult career stimulates him to put fresh hand to the work. It is of importance to the dramatic poet to be connected immediately with the stage, that he may either himself guide it, or learn to accomodate himself to its wants ; and the dramatic poets of that day were, for the most part, also players. The theatre still made small claims to literature, and it thus escaped the pedantry of scholastic learning. There were as yet no periodical writings which, as the instrument of cabal, could mislead opinion. Of jealousy and bickerings among the authors there was no want ; this however was more a source of amusement than of displeasure to the public, who decided without prejudice or partiality according to the mass of its entertainment. The poets and players, as well as the spectators, possessed in general the most essential requisite of success : a true love for the business.

This was the more unquestionable, as the theatrical art was not then surrounded with all those foreign ornaments and inventions of luxury, which serve to distract the attention and corrupt the sense, but made its appearance in the most modest, and we may well say in the most humble shape. For the admirers of Shakspeare it must be an object of curiosity to know what was the appearance of the theatre in which his works were first performed. We have an engraving of the play-house of which he was manager, and which, from the symbol of a Hercules supplying the place of Atlas, was called the globe: it is a massive structure destitute of architectural ornaments, and almost without windows in the outward walls. The pit was open to the sky, and they acted by day-light; the scene had no other decoration than wrought tapestry, which hung at some distance from the walls, and left room for several entrances. In the back-ground there was a stage raised above the first, a sort of balcony, which served for various purposes, and was obliged to signify all manner of things according to circumstances. The players appeared, excepting on a few rare occasions, in the dress of their time, or at most distinguished by higher feathers on their hats and roses on their shoes. The chief means of disguise were false hair and beards, and occasionally even masks. The female parts were played by boys so long as their voice allowed them. Two companies of actors in London consisted even entirely of boys, namely the choir of the Queen's Chapel, and of St. Paul's. Betwixt the acts it was

not customary to have music, but in the pieces themselves marches, dances, solo songs, and the like, were introduced on proper occasions, and trumpet flourishes at the entrance of great personages. In the more early time it was usual to represent the action before it was spoken, in silent pantomime (*dumb show*) between each act, allegorically or even without any disguise, to give a definite direction to the expectation. Shakspeare has still observed this practice in the play in *Hamlet*.

From the outlay in all theatrical accessories :—the architecture of the theatre, lighting, music, the illusion of decorations changing in a moment as if by enchantment, machinery and costume ; we are now so completely spoiled that this meager and confined mode of stage decoration will in no manner satisfy us. Many things however might perhaps be urged in favour of such a constitution of the theatre. Where they are not enticed by any splendid accessories, the spectators will be the more difficult to please in the main thing, namely, the excellence of the dramatic composition, and its vivification by delivery and action. When perfection is not attainable in external decoration, the critic will rather altogether overlook it than allow himself to be disturbed by its defectiveness and want of taste. And how seldom has perfection been here attained ! It is about a century and a half since attention began to be paid to the observation of costume on the European theatres ; what has been performed in this way has always appeared excellent to the multitude, and yet from the engravings which sometimes



accompany the printed plays, and from every evidence, we may easily convince ourselves that it was always characterised by puerility and mannerism, and that in all the endeavours to assume a foreign or antique appearance, they never could shake themselves free of the fashions of their own time. A sort of hoop was long considered as an indispensable appendage of a hero; the long peruques and *fontanges*, or topknots, kept their ground in heroical tragedy as long as in real life; afterwards it would have been considered as barbarous to appear without powdered and frizzled hair; on this was placed a helmet with variegated feathers; a taffeta scarf fluttered over the gilt paper coat of mail; and the Achilles or Alexander was then completely mounted. We have now at last returned to a purer taste, and in some great theatres the costume is actually observed in a learned and severe style. We owe this principally to the antiquarian reform in the plastic arts, and the approximation of the female dress to the Grecian; for the actresses were always the most inveterate in retaining on the stage those fashions by which they turned their charms to account in society. However, even yet there are very few players who know how to wear a Grecian purple mantle, or a toga, in a natural and becoming manner; and who, in moments of passion, do not seem to be unduly occupied with holding and tossing about their drapery.

Our system of decoration was properly invented for the opera, to which it is also in reality best adapted. It has several inevitable defects; others

which certainly may be avoided, but which seldom are avoided. Among the inevitable defects I reckon the breaking of the lines in the side scenes from every point of view except one, the disproportion between the size of the player when he appears in the back ground and the objects as diminished in the perspective; the unfavourable lighting from below and behind; the contrast between the painted and the actual lights and shades; the impossibility of narrowing the stage at pleasure so that the inside of a palace and a hut have the same length and breadth, &c. The errors which may be avoided are, want of simplicity and of great and reposing masses; overloading the scenery with superfluous and distracting objects, either from the painter being desirous of showing his strength in perspective, or not knowing how to fill up the space otherwise; an architecture full of mannerism often altogether unconnected, nay, even at variance with possibility, coloured in a motley manner which resembles no species of stone in the world. The most of the scene-painters owe their success entirely to the ignorance of the spectators in the plastic arts: I have often seen a whole pit enchanted with a decoration from which every intelligent eye must have turned away with disgust, and in place of which a plain green wall would have been infinitely better. From the vitiated taste in respect to the splendour of decorations and magnificence of the dresses, the arrangement of the theatre has become a complicated and expensive business, whence it frequently happens that the main requi-

sites, good pieces and good players, are considered as secondary matters; but this is an inconvenience which it is here unnecessary to mention.

Although the earlier English stage had properly no decorations, we must allow however that it was not altogether destitute of machinery: without it, it is almost impossible to conceive how several pieces, for instance, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and others, could ever be represented. The celebrated architect, Inigo Jones, who lived in the reign of James the First, put in motion very complicated and artificial machines for the decoration of the masks of Ben Jonson which were acted at court.

In the Spanish theatre at the time of its formation, as well as in the English, the same circumstance took place, namely, that when the stage remained a moment empty, and other persons came in by another entrance, a change of scene was supposed though none was visible; and this circumstance had the most favourable influence on the form of the dramas. The poet was not obliged to consult the scene-painter to know what could or what could not be represented; nor to calculate whether the store of decorations on hand were sufficient, or new ones would be requisite. He imposed no constraint on the action with respect to change of times and places, but represented it entirely as it would have naturally taken place:\*, he left to the imagination

\* Capell, an intelligent commentator on Shakspeare, unjustly under-rated by the others, has placed the advantages in this respect in the clearest light, in an observation on *Antony and Cleopatra*. It emboldened the poet, when the truth of the

to fill up the intervals agreeably to the speeches, and to conceive all the surrounding circumstances.— This call on the fancy to supply the deficiencies supposes, indeed, not merely benevolent, but also intelligent spectators in a poetical tone of mind. That is the true illusion, when the spectators are so completely carried away by the impressions of the poetry and the acting, that they overlook the secondary matters, and forget the whole of the remaining objects around them. The lying censoriously on the watch to discover whether any circumstance may not violate an apparent reality which, strictly speaking, never can be attained, is a proof of inertness of imagination and an incapacity to be deceived. This prosaical incredulity may be carried so far as to render it utterly impossible for the theatrical artists, who in every constitution of the theatre require many indulgencies, to amuse the spectators by their productions; and in this manner they are, in the end, the enemies of their own enjoyment.

We now complain, and with justice, that in Shakspeare's pieces the too frequent change of scenes occasions an interruption. But the poet is here perfectly blameless. It ought to be known that the English plays of that time, as well as the Spanish, were printed without any mention of the scene and its changes. In Shakspeare the modern editors have inserted the scenical directions; and in doing

action required it, to plan scenes which the most skilful mechanist and scene-painter could scarcely exhibit to the eye; as for instance, in a Spanish play where sea fights occur.



so they have proceeded with the most pedantic accuracy. Whoever has the management of the representation of a piece of Shakspeare's may, without any hesitation, at once strike out all the changes of scene of the following description:—  
“Another room in the palace, another street, another part of the field of battle,” &c.—By these means alone, in most cases, the change of decorations will be reduced to a very moderate number.

Of the art of the actors on a theatre which possessed so little external splendour as the old English, those who are in the habit of judging of the man from his dress will not be inclined to entertain a very favourable idea. I am induced, however, from this very circumstance, to draw quite a contrary conclusion: the want of attractions of an accessory nature renders it the more necessary to be careful in essentials. Several Englishmen\* have given it as their opinion, that the players of the first epoch were in all likelihood greatly superior to those of the second, at least with the exception of Garrick; and if we had no other proof, the quality of the pieces of Shakspeare renders this extremely probable. That most of his principal characters require a great player is self-evident; the elevated and compressed style of his poetry cannot be understood without the most energetic and flexible delivery; he often supposes between the speeches a mute action of great difficulty, for which he gives

\* See a Dialogue prefixed to the 11th volume of Dodsley's *Old Plays*.

no directions. A poet who labours only and immediately for the stage will not rely for his main effect on traits which he must beforehand know will be lost in the representation from the unskillfulness of his interpreters. Shakspeare must have therefore purposely lowered the tone of his dramatic art, if he had not possessed excellent theatrical assistants. The name and fame of some of them have descended even to our times. As we are not fond of allowing any one man to possess two great talents in an equal degree, it has been assumed on very questionable grounds, that Shakspeare was himself but an indifferent actor.\* The instructions of Hamlet to the players prove at least that he was an excellent judge of acting. We know that correctness of conception and judgment are not always coupled with the means of execution; Shakspeare,

\* No certain account has yet been obtained of any principal part played by Shakspeare in his own pieces. In *Hamlet* he played the Ghost: certainly a very important part, if we consider that from the failure in it the whole piece runs a risk of appearing ridiculous. A writer of his time says in a satirical pamphlet, that the Ghost whined in a pitiful manner; and it has been concluded from this that Shakspeare was a bad player.—What logic! On the restoration of the theatre under Charles the Second, they were desirous of collecting traditions and information respecting the former period. Lowin, the original Hamlet, instructed Betterton as to the proper conception of the character. There was still alive a brother of Shakspeare, a decrepid old man, who had never had any literary cultivation, and whose memory was impaired by age. From him they could extract nothing, but that he had sometimes visited his brother in town, and once saw him play an old man with grey hair and beard. From the above description it was concluded, that this

however, possessed a very important and too frequently neglected requisite for serious acting, a beautiful and noble countenance. Neither is it probable that he could have been manager of the most respectable theatre, had he not himself possessed the talent of acting and guiding the action of others. Ben Jonson, though a meritorious poet, could not even obtain the situation of a player, as he did not possess the requisite qualifications. From the passage cited from *Hamlet*, from the burlesque tragedy of the mechanics in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and many other passages, it is evident that there was then an inundation of bad players, who fell into all the aberrations from propriety with which at the present day we are offended; but the public, it would appear, knew well how to distinguish, and could not be easily satisfied.\*

A thorough critical knowledge of the antiquities of the English theatre can only be obtained in England: the old editions of the pieces which belong to the earlier period are even there extremely rare,

must have been the faithful servant Adam in *As You Like It*; also a second-rate part. In most of Shakspeare's pieces we have not the slightest knowledge of the manner in which the parts were distributed. In two of Ben Jonson's pieces we see Shakspeare's name among the principal actors.

\* In this respect, the following simile in *Richard the Third* is deserving of attention:—

As in a theatre the eyes of men,  
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,  
Are idly bent on him that enters next,  
Thinking his prattle to be tedious, &c.

and in foreign libraries they are never to be met with; the modern collectors have merely been able to give a few specimens, and not the whole store. It would be highly important to see together all the plays which were undoubtedly in existence before Shakspeare entered on his career, that we might be able to decide with certainty how much of the dramatic art it was possible for him to have learned from others. The year of the appearance of a piece on the stage is generally, however, difficult to ascertain, as it was often not printed till long afterwards. If in the labours of the contemporaries of Shakspeare, even the older who continued to write at the same time with himself, we can discover the resemblance of his style and traces of his art, still it will always remain doubtful whether we are to consider these as the feeble model, or the imperfect imitation. Shakspeare appears to have had all the flexibility of mind, and all the modesty, of Raphael, who, also, without ever being an imitator and becoming unfaithful to his sublime and tranquil genius, applied all the advances of his competitors to his own advantage.

A few feeble attempts to introduce the form of the antique tragedy with chorusses, &c. were made at an early period, and praised without producing any effect. They show, like most of the attempts of the moderns in this way, the singular spectacles through which the old poets were viewed; for it is hardly to be conceived how unlike they are to the Greek tragedies, not merely in worth, for that we may easily suppose, but even in those external



circumstances which may be the most easily laid hold of. *Ferrex and Porrex, or the Tragedy of Gorboduc*, is most frequently cited, which was the production of a lord, in the first part of the reign of Elizabeth. Pope bestows high praise on this piece, on account of its regularity, and laments that the contemporary poets did not follow in the same track ; for thus he thought a classical theatre would have been formed in England. This opinion only proves that Pope, who however passes for a perfect judge of poetry, had not even an idea of the first elements of the dramatic art. Nothing can be more spiritless and inanimate, nor more drawling and monotonous in the tone of the language and in the versification, than this *Ferrex and Porrex* ; and although the unities of place and time are in no manner observed, and a number of events are crowded into it, yet the scene is wholly destitute of movement : all that happens is previously announced in endless consultations, and afterwards stated in equally endless narratives. *Mustapha*, another unsuccessful work of a kindred description, and also by a great lord, is a tedious web of all sorts of political subtleties ; the chorusses in particular are true treatises. However, of the innumerable maxims in rhyme, there are many which might well have a place in the later pieces of Corneille. Kyd, one of the predecessors of Ben Jonson, and named by him in terms of praise, handled the *Cornelia* of Garnier. This may be called receiving an imitation of the ancients from the third or fourth hand.

The first serious piece calculated for popular

effect is *the Spanish Tragedy*, so called from the scene of the story, and not from its being borrowed from a Spanish writer. It kept possession of the stage for a tolerable length of time, though it was often the subject of the ridicule and the parodies of the succeeding poets. It usually happens that the public do not easily return from a predilection entertained by them in their first warm susceptibility for the impressions of an art yet unknown to them, even after they have long been acquainted with better, nay, with excellent, works. This piece is certainly full of puerilities; the author has ventured on the picture of violent situations and passions without suspecting his own inability; the catastrophe more especially, which in horror is intended to outstrip every thing conceivable, is introduced in a silly manner, and produces merely a ludicrous effect. The whole is like the drawings of children, without any observation of proportions, and without steadiness of hand. With a great deal of bombast, the tone of the dialogue, however, has something natural, nay, even familiar, and in the change of scenes we perceive a light movement, which in some degree will account for the general applause received by this immature production.

Lilly and Marlow deserve to be noticed among the predecessors of Shakspeare. Lilly was a scholar, and laboured to introduce a stilted elegance in English prose, and in the tone of dialogue, with such success, that for a period he was the fashionable writer, and the court ladies even formed their conversation after the model of his book *Euphæ*.

His comedy in prose, *Campaspe*, is a warning example of the impossibility of ever constructing, from anecdotes and epigrammatic sallies, any thing like a dramatic whole. The author was a learned witling, but in no respect a poet.

Marlow possessed more real talent, and was in a better way. He has handled the history of *Edward the Second* in a very artless manner it is true, but with a certain truth and simplicity, so that many scenes do not fail to produce a pathetic effect. His verses are flowing, but without energy; how Ben Jonson could come to use the expression, *Marlow's mighty line*, is more than I can conceive. Shakspeare could neither learn nor derive any thing from the luscious manner of Lilly; but in Marlow's *Edward the Second*, I certainly imagine that I can discover the feeble model of the earliest historical pieces of Shakspeare.

Of the old comedies in Dodsley's collection, *the Pinner of Wakefelde*, and *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*, seem alone to belong to a period before Shakspeare. Both are not without merit, in the manner of Marionette pieces: in the first, a popular tradition; and in the second, a merry legend is handled with hearty joviality.

I have dwelt longer on the beginnings of the English theatre, than from their internal worth they deserve, because it has been affirmed recently in England, that Shakspeare shows more affinity to the works of his contemporaries now sunk in oblivion, than people have hitherto been usually disposed to believe. We are as little to wonder at certain

outward resemblances, as at the similarity of the dresses in portraits of the same period. In a more limited sense, however, we apply the word resemblance only to the relation of those features which express the spirit and the mind. Moreover, plays can only be admitted as a satisfactory proof of such an affirmation, which are ascertained to have been written before the commencement of Shakspeare's career; for in the works of his younger contemporaries, a Decker, Marston, Webster, and others, something of a resemblance may be very naturally accounted for; the traces of the imitation of Shakspeare are sufficiently distinct. Their imitation was, however, merely confined to external appearance and separate peculiarities; these writers, without the virtues of their model, possess in reality all the faults which senseless critics have falsely censured in Shakspeare.

A sentence somewhat more favourable is merited by Chapman, the Translator of Homer, and Thomas Heywood, judging of them from the single specimens in Dodsley's collection. Chapman has handled the well known story of the Ephesian Matron, under the title of *the Widow's Tears*, not without comic talent. Heywood's *Woman Killed with Kindness* is a familiar tragedy: so early may we find examples of this species, which has been given out for new. It is the story of a wife tenderly beloved by her husband, and seduced by a man whom he had loaded with benefits; her error is discovered, and the severest determination which her husband can bring himself to form is, to remove her from him without



proclaiming her dishonour: she grieves herself to death from repentance. A due gradation is not observed in the seduction, but the last scenes are truly agitating. A distinct pronounciation of a moral aim is, perhaps, essential to the familiar tragedy; or rather, by means of such an aim, a picture of human destinies, whether relating to kings or private families, is drawn down from the ideal sphere into the prosaic world. But when once we admit the title of this subordinate species, we shall find that the demands of morality and the dramatic art coincide, and that the utmost severity of moral principles leads again to poetical elevation. The aspect of that false repentance which merely seeks exemption from punishment is painful; repentance, as the pain arising from the irreparable forfeiture of innocence, is susceptible of a truly tragic portraiture. Let there be given to the above piece a happy conclusion, such a one as in the present day, notwithstanding this painful feeling, has obtained such general applause in a well known play: \* namely, the reconciliation of the husband and wife, not on the death-bed of the repentant sinner, but in sound mind and body, and the renewal of the marriage; and it will then be found that it has not merely lost its moral, but also its poetical impression.

In other respects, this piece of Heywood is very inartificial and carelessly finished: instead of duly developing the main action, the author distracts our attention by a second intrigue, which can hardly be

\* The author alludes to Kotzebue's play of *Menschenhass und Reue* (The Stranger).—TRANS.

said to have the slightest connexion with the other. At this we need hardly be astonished, for Heywood was both a player and an excessively prolific author. Two hundred and twenty pieces were, he says, written entirely, or for the greatest part, by himself; and he was so careless respecting these productions, which were probably completed by him without any great labour, that he had lost the manuscripts of the most of them, and only twenty-five remained for publication by means of the press.

All the above authors, and many others besides, whatever applause they obtained in their life-time, have been unsuccessful in transmitting a living memorial of their works to posterity. Of Shakspeare's younger contemporaries and competitors, few have attained this distinction; chiefly Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger.

Ben Jonson found in Shakspeare a ready encourager of his talents. His first piece, imperfect in many respects, *Every Man in his Humour*, was by Shakspeare's intervention brought on the stage; *Sejanus* was even touched by him, and in both he undertook a principal character. This hospitable reception on the part of that great man, who was far above every thing like jealousy and petty rivalry, met with a very ungrateful return. Jonson assumed a superiority over Shakspeare on account of his school learning, the only point in which he really had an advantage; he introduced all sorts of biting allusions into his pieces and prologues, and reprobated more especially those magical flights of fancy, the peculiar heritage of Shakspeare, as contrary to

genuine taste. In justification of him we must remark, that he was not born under a happy star: his pieces were either altogether unsuccessful, or they obtained but a small share of applause compared with the astonishing popularity of Shakspeare; moreover, he was incessantly attacked by his rivals with all manner of satires, on the theatre and elsewhere, as a disagreeable pedant, who pretended to know every thing better than themselves:—all this rendered him atrabilious in the extreme. He possessed in reality a very solid understanding; he was conscious that in the exercise of his art he displayed zeal and seriousness: that Nature had denied him grace, a property which no effort can give, he could not indeed suspect. He thought every man may boast of his assuiduity, as Lessing says on a similar occasion. After several failures on the stage, he formed the resolution of declaring in the outset of his pieces that they were good, and that if they should not please, this could only proceed from the senselessness of the multitude. The epigraph of one of his unfortunate pieces which he committed to the press is highly amusing: “As it was never acted, but most negligently played by some, the King’s servants, and more squeamishly beheld and censured by others, the King’s subjects.”

Jonson was a critical poet in the good and bad sense of the word. He endeavoured to form an exact estimate of what he had on every occasion to perform; hence he succeeded best in that species where the understanding comes in for the greatest share, and imagination and feeling are merely

subordinate,—the comedy of character. He introduced nothing into his works which critical dissection could not again extract, as his confidence was such in it, that he conceived it exhausted every thing which pleases and charms us in poetry. He was not aware that, in the chemical retort of the critic, what is most valuable, the fugacious living spirit of a poem, evaporates. His pieces are in general deficient in soul, in that nameless something which always continues to attract and enchant us, for the very reason that it cannot be defined. In the lyrical pieces of his masks, we feel the want of a certain mental music of imagery and intonation, which cannot be produced by the accurate observation of a difficult measure. He is every where deficient in those excellencies which flow unsolicited from the pen of the poet ; and which no artist, who purposely hunts after them, can ever hope to obtain. We must not quarrel with him, however, for the high opinion which he entertained of his works ; for the merit they have he owed altogether to himself, like acquired moral properties. The production of them was attended with labour, and unfortunately it is also a labour to read them. They resemble solid and regular edifices, before which however the clumsy scaffolding has remained, to interrupt and prevent us from viewing the architecture with ease, and receiving from it a harmonious impression.

We have two tragical attempts of Jonson, and a considerable number of comedies and masks.

He could have risen to the dignity of the tragic tone, but he had not the smallest turn for the



pathetic. As he incessantly preaches up the imitation of the ancients, and we cannot deny him a learned acquaintance with their works, it is astonishing to observe how much his two tragedies differ, both in substance and form, from the Greek tragedy. From this example we may see the influence which the prevailing tone of an age, and the course already pursued in an art, must necessarily have upon even the most independent minds. In the historical extent given by Jonson to his *Sejanus* and *Cataline*, unity of time and place were entirely out of the question; and both pieces are crowded with a multitude of secondary persons, such as we never find in any Greek tragedy. In *Cataline*, the prologue is spoken by the spirit of Scylla, and it bears a good deal of resemblance to that of Tantalus, in the *Atreus and Thyestes* of Seneca; to the end of each act an instructive moralising chorus is appended, without being duly introduced or connected with the whole. This is the extent of the resemblance to the ancients; in other respects, the form of Shakspeare's historical dramas is adhered to, but without their romantic charm. We cannot with certainty say, whether or not Jonson had the Roman pieces of Shakspeare before him: it is probable that he had in *Cataline* at least; but, at all events, he has not learned from him the art of remaining true to history, and yet satisfying the demands of poetry. In Jonson's hands, the subject continues history without becoming poetry; the political events which he has described have more the appearance of a business than an action. *Cataline*

and *Sejanus* are solid dramatic studies after Sallust and Cicero, after Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, and others; and that is the best which we can say of them. In *Cataline*, which upon the whole is preferable to *Sejanus*, he is also censurable for not having blended the dissimilarity of the masses. The first act possesses most elevation, though it disgusts us from its want of moderation: we see a secret assembly of conspirators, and nature appears to answer the furious inspiration of wickedness by dreadful signs. The second act paints the intrigues and loves of depraved women, by which the conspiracy was brought to light, and treads closely on comedy; the last three acts contain a history in dialogue, developed with much good sense, but little poetical elevation. It is to be lamented that Jonson gave only his own text of *Sejanus* without communicating the alterations of Shakspeare. We should have been curious to know the means by which he might have attempted to give animation to the uniformity of the piece without changing its plan, and how far his genius could accommodate itself to foreign purposes.

After these attempts Jonson took his leave of the tragic muse, and in reality his talents were altogether adapted to comedy, and that too merely the comedy of character. His characterisation however is better suited to serious satire than playful ridicule; the later Roman satirists, rather than the comic authors, were his models. Nature had denied him that light and easy raillery which plays harmlessly round every thing, and which seems to be the mere effu-

sion of gaiety, but which is so much the more philosophic, as it is not the vehicle of any definite doctrine, but merely contains a general irony.— There is more of a spirit of observation than of fancy in the comic inventions of Jonson. Hence his pieces are defective also in point of intrigue. He was a strong advocate for the purity of the species, was unwilling to make use of any romantic motives, and he never had recourse to a novel. But his means of entangling and disentangling his plot are often improbable and constrained, without gaining over the imagination by their attractive boldness. Even where he has contrived a happy plot, he required so much room for the delineation of the characters, that we often lose sight of the intrigue altogether, and the action moves on with the most heavy pace. He sometimes resembles those too accurate portrait painters, who for the sake of a likeness imagine they must include in the imitation every mark of the small pox, every carbuncle or freckle. He has been frequently suspected of having had real persons in his eye in the delineation of particular characters; he has been at the same time reproached with making his characters merely a personification of general ideas, and although these reproaches seem at variance with each other, they are neither of them however without some foundation. He possessed a methodical head; consequently where he had once conceived a character in its leading idea, he followed it out with the utmost strictness; what merely served to give individual animation, without reference to this leading idea,

would have appeared to him in the light of a digression. Hence his names are, for the most part, expressive even to an unpleasant degree of distinctness; and, to add to our satiety, he not unfrequently tacks explanatory descriptions to the dramatis personæ. On the other hand he acted upon this principle—that the comic writer must exhibit to us real life, with a minute and petty diligence. He generally seized the manners of his own nation and age: this was deserving of praise; but he attached himself too much to external peculiarities, to the singularities and affectations of the modish tone which were then called humours, and which from their nature are as transient as dresses. Hence a great part of his comic very soon became obsolete, and as early as the re-opening of the theatre under Charles the Second, no actors could be found who were capable of doing justice to such caricatures. Local colours like these can only be preserved from fading by the most complete seasoning with wit. This is what Shakspeare has effected. Compare, for instance, his Ostrick in *Hamlet* with Fastidius Brisk in Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*: both are portraitures of the insipid affectation of a courtier of that day; but Ostrick, although he speaks his own peculiar language, will remain to the end of time an exact and intelligible image of foppish folly, whereas Fastidius is merely a portrait in a dress no longer in fashion, and nothing more. However Jonson has not always fallen into this error; his Captain Bobadill, for example, in *Every Man in his Humour*, a beggarly and cowardly adventurer,



who passes himself off with young and simple people for a Hector, is, it is true, far from being as amusing and original as Pistol, but he remains also a model in his way, notwithstanding the change of manners, and he has been imitated by English comic writers of after times.

In the piece which I have just named, the first work of Jonson, the action is extremely feeble and insignificant. In the following, *Every Man out of his Humour*, he has gone still farther astray, in seeking the comic effect merely in caricatured traits, without any interest of situation: it is a rhapsody of ludicrous scenes without connexion and progress. The *Bartholomew Fair* is also merely a coarse *Bambocciate*, in which we do not remark more connexion than in the hubbub, the noise, the quarrelling and thefts, which usually take place on the occasion of such an amusement of the populace. Vulgar delight is too naturally portrayed; the part of the Puritan however is deserving of distinction: his casuistical consultation, whether he ought to eat a sucking pig according to the custom of the fair, and his lecture afterwards against puppet-shows as a heathen idolatry, are inimitable, and full of the most powerful comic salt. Ben Jonson did not then foresee that the Puritans, before the lapse of one generation, would be sufficiently powerful to take a very severe revenge on his art, on account of similar raileries.

In so far as plot is concerned, the greatest praise is merited by *Volpone*, the *Alchemist*, and *Epicæne*, or the *Silent Woman*. In *Volpone* Jonson for once

has entered into Italian manners, but not taken an ideal view of them. The leading idea is admirable, and for the most part executed in a masterly manner: towards the end however the whole turns too much on swindling and villany, which necessarily calls for the interference of criminal justice, and the piece, from the punishment of the guilty, has every thing but a merry conclusion. In the *Alchemist* both the deceivers and deceived afford us a fund of entertainment, only the author enters too deeply into alchemistical learning. Of an unintelligible jargon very short specimens ought only to be given in comedy, and it is best that they should have a secondary signification, of which the person who uses the mysterious language is not himself aware; when carried to too great a length, it occasions wearisomeness as well as the writings themselves, which served as a model. In *The Devil's an Ass*, the poet has failed to draw due advantage from a fanciful invention with which he begins, but which indeed was not his own; and our expectation, after being so deceived, remains dissatisfied with other scenes of a good comic description.

Of all the pieces of Jonson, there is hardly one, as it stands, which would please on a theatre in the present day, as the most of them indeed did not please in his own time; but extracts from them could hardly fail to be successful. In general, much might be borrowed from him, and much might be learned both from his merits and defects. His characters are for the most part solidly and judiciously drawn; he merely fails in the art of setting them off by the contrast of situations.

He has seldom in this respect planned his scenes so successfully as in *Every Man in his Humour*, where the jealous merchant is called off to an important business, when his wife is in expectation of a visit of which he is suspicious, and where he is anxious to station his servant as a centinel without however confiding his secret to him, because above all things he dreads lest his jealousy should be remarked. This scene is a master-piece, and if Jonson had always so composed, we must have been obliged to rank him among the first comic writers.

We merely mention the *masks*, lest we should be charged with an omission: allegorical occasional pieces, chiefly destined for court festivals, and decorated with machinery, masked dresses, dancing, and singing. This secondary species died again nearly with Jonson; the only production of any fame in this way, at an after period, is the *Comus* of Milton. When allegory is confined to mere personification, it must infallibly turn out very frigid in a play; the action itself must be allegorical, and in this respect there are many ingenious inventions, but the Spanish poets have almost alone furnished us with successful examples. The peculiarity of Jonson's masks most deserving of remark seems to me to be the anti-masks, as they are called, which the poet himself sometimes attaches to his invention, and generally allows to precede the serious act. As the ideal flatteries, for which the gods have been brought down from Olympus, are but too apt to become luscious, this antidote on such occasions is certainly deserving of commendation.

Ben Jonson, who in all his pieces took a mechanical view of art, bore a farther resemblance to the master of a handicraft in taking an apprentice.—He had a servant of the name of *Broome*, who formed himself as a theatrical writer from the conversation and instructions of his master, and brought comedies on the stage with applause.

*Beaumont* and *Fletcher* are always named together, as if they were two inseparable poets, whose works were all planned and executed in common. This idea, however, is not altogether correct. We know, indeed, but little of the circumstances of their lives: this much however is known, that *Beaumont* died very young; and that *Fletcher* survived his younger friend ten years, and continued so unremittingly active in his career as a dramatic poet, that several of his plays were first brought on the stage after his death, and some which he left unfinished were completed by another hand. The pieces collected under both names amount to upwards of fifty; and it is probable that of this number the half must be considered as the work of *Fletcher* alone. *Beaumont* and *Fletcher*'s works first made their appearance a short time after their death; the publishers have not given themselves the trouble to distinguish critically the share which belonged to each, and still less to afford us any information respecting the diversity of their talents. Some of their contemporaries have attributed boldness of imagination to *Fletcher*, and a mature judgment to his friend: the former, according to their opinion, was the inventive genius; the latter the directing



and moderating critic. But this account rests on no foundation. It is now impossible to distinguish with certainty the hand of each; nor would the knowledge repay the labour. All the pieces ascribed to them, whether they proceed from one alone or from both, are composed in the same spirit and in the same manner. Hence it is probable that it was not so much the want of supplying the deficiencies of each other, as the great resemblance of their way of thinking, which induced them to continue so long and so inseparably united.

Beaumont and Fletcher began their career in the life-time of Shakspeare: Beaumont even died before him, and Fletcher only survived him nine years. From some allusions in the way of parody, we may conclude that they entertained no very extravagant admiration of their great predecessor; from whom however they learned so much, and unquestionably borrowed many of their thoughts. They followed his example in the whole form of their plays, regardless of the different principles of Ben Jonson and the imitation of the ancients. They drew, like him, from novels and romances; they mixed up pathetic and burlesque scenes with each other, and endeavoured, by the concatenation of the incidents, to excite the impression of the extraordinary and the wonderful. Their intention of surpassing Shakspeare in this species is often sufficiently evident; their contemporary eulogists indeed have no hesitation in ranking Shakspeare far below them, and assert that the English stage was first brought by Beaumont and Fletcher to perfection. The fame of

Shakspeare was in reality in some degree eclipsed by them in the generation which immediately succeeded him, and in the time of Charles the Second they still possessed a greater popularity: the progress of time has, however, restored all the three to their due place. As on the theatre the highest excellence wears out by frequent repetition, and novelty must always possess a great charm, the dramatic art is consequently very much under the influence of fashion; it is more exposed than other branches of literature and the fine arts to the danger of passing rapidly from a grand and simple style to dazzling and superficial mannerism.

Beaumont and Fletcher were in fact men of the most distinguished talents; they hardly wanted any thing but a more profound seriousness of mind, and that sagacity in art which observes a due measure in every thing, to deserve a place beside the greatest dramatic poets of all nations. They possessed an uncommon fecundity and flexibility of mind, and a felicitous ease which too often however degenerated into levity. The highest perfection they have hardly ever attained; and I should have little hesitation in affirming, that they had not even an idea of it: however, on several occasions they have approached quite close to it. And why was it denied them to take this last step? Poetry was not for them an inward devotion of the feeling and imagination, but a means to obtain brilliant results. Their first object was effect, which the great artist can hardly fail of attaining if he is determined above all things

to satisfy himself. They were not players \* like the most of their predecessors ; but they lived in the neighbourhood of the theatre, were in constant intercourse with it, and possessed a perfect understanding of theatrical matters. They were also thoroughly acquainted with their contemporaries ; but they found it more convenient to lower themselves to the taste of the public than to follow the example of Shakspeare, who elevated the public to himself. They lived in a vigorous age, which more willingly pardoned extravagancies of every description than feebleness and frigidity. They never therefore allowed themselves to be restrained by poetical or moral considerations ; and in this confidence they found their account : they resemble in some measure somnambulists, who with their eyes shut tread in dangerous ways without falling. Even when they undertake what is most depraved they enter on it with a certain felicity. In the commencement of a degeneracy in the dramatic art, the spectators first lose the capability of judging of a play as a whole ; hence Beaumont and Fletcher bestow the least attention on the harmony of the composition and the due proportion between all the different parts. They not unfrequently lose sight of a happily framed plot, and appear almost to for-

\* In the privilege granted by James the First to the royal players, *Laurence Fletcher* is named along with Shakspeare as manager of the company. The poet's name was John Fletcher. Perhaps the former might be his brother or near relation.

get it ; they bring something else forward equally capable of affording pleasure and entertainment, but which does not belong to that place, and which has no preparation. They always excite curiosity, frequently compassion—they hurry us along with them ; they succeed better however in exciting our expectation than in gratifying it. So long as we read them we feel ourselves keenly interested ; but they leave very few imperishable impressions behind. They are least successful in their tragic attempts, because their feeling is not sufficiently drawn from the depths of human nature, and because they bestowed too little attention on the general consideration of human destinies : they succeed much better in comedy, and in those serious and pathetic pictures which occupy a middle place betwixt comedy and tragedy. The characters are often drawn in rather an arbitrary manner, and become untrue to themselves when it suits the momentary wants of the poet ; in external matters they are sufficiently in keeping. Beaumont and Fletcher employ the whole strength of their talent in pictures of passion ; but they enter little on the secret history of the heart ; they pass over the first emotions and the gradual heightening of a feeling ; they seize it as it were in its highest gradations, and then develop its symptoms with the most overpowering illusion, though with an exaggerated strength and fulness. But though its expression does not always possess the strictest truth, it still however appears natural ; every thing has free motion ; nothing is laboriously constrained or far-fetched, however strik-



ing it may sometimes appear. They completely unite in their dialogue the familiar tone of real conversation and the appearance of momentary suggestion with poetical elevation. They even run into that favourite affectation of the natural which has been the means of obtaining such great success to some dramatic poets of our own time; but the latter sought it in the absence of all elevation of fancy; and hence, from necessity, they could not help falling into insipidity. Beaumont and Fletcher generally couple homeliness\* with fancy; and they succeed in giving an extraordinary appearance to what is common, and thus preserve a certain fallacious image of the ideal. The morality of these writers is ambiguous. Not that they failed in strong colours to contrast greatness of soul and goodness with baseness and wickedness, or did not usually conclude with the disgrace and punishment of the latter; but an ostentatious generosity is often exhibited in lieu of duty and justice. Every thing good and excellent arises in their pictures more from transient ebullition than fixed principle; they seem to place the virtues in the blood; and impulses of merely a selfish and instinct-like nature hold up their heads quite close to them as if they were of nobler origin. There is an incurable vulgar side of human nature which the poet should never approach but with a certain bashfulness, when he cannot avoid allowing it to be perceived; but instead of this Beaumont and Fletcher throw no veil whatever over na-

\* *Natürlichkeit*, literally, naturalness.—TRANS.

ture. They express every thing bluntly in words ; they make the spectator the unwilling confidant of all that more noble minds endeavour even to hide from themselves. The indecencies in which these poets allowed themselves to indulge exceed all conception. The licentiousness of the language is the least evil ; many scenes, nay, even whole plots, are so contrived that the very idea of them, not to mention the sight, is a gross insult to modesty. Aristophanes is a bold interpreter of sensuality ; but like the Grecian statuaries in the figures of satyrs, &c. he banishes them into the animal kingdom to which they wholly belong ; and judging of him according to the morality of his times he is much less offensive. But Beaumont and Fletcher exhibit the impure and nauseous colouring of vice to our view in quite a different sphere ; their compositions resemble the sheet full of pure and impure animals in the vision of the Apostle. This was the universal inclination of the dramatic poets under James and Charles the First. They seem as if they purposely wished to justify the Puritans, who affirmed the theatres were so many schools of seduction and chapels of the Devil.

To those who merely read for amusement and general cultivation we can only recommend the works of Beaumont and Fletcher with some limitation.\* For the practical artist, however, and the

\* Hence I cannot approve of the undertaking, which has been recently commenced, of translating them into German. They are not at all adapted for our great public, and whoever makes a particular study of dramatic poetry will have little difficulty in finding his way to the originals.

critical judge of dramatic poetry, an infinite deal may be learned from them; as well from their merits as their extravagancies. A minute dissection of one of their works, for which we have not here the necessary room, would serve to place this in the clearest light. These pieces had this convenience in representation in their time, that such great actors were not necessary to fill the principal characters as in Shakspeare's plays. To bring them on the stage in our days, it would be necessary to recast the most of them; with some of them we might succeed by omitting, moderating, and purging various passages.\*

*The Two Noble Kinsmen* is deserving of more particular mention, as it is the joint production of Shakspeare and Fletcher. I see no ground for calling this in question; the piece, it is true, did not make its appearance till after the death of both; but what could be the motive with the editor or printer for any deception, as Fletcher's name was then, at least, in as great, if not more, celebrity than Shakspeare's? Were it the sole production of Fletcher, it would undoubtedly have to be ranked as the best of his serious and heroic pieces. However, it would be unfair to a writer of talent to take from him a work for the mere reason that it is too good for him. Might not Fletcher, who in his thoughts and images not unfrequently shows an affi-

\* So far as I know only one play has yet been brought on the German theatre, namely, *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*, rewritten by Schröder under the title of *Stille Wasser sind tief* (Still Waters run deep) which, when well acted, has always been uncommonly well received.

nity to Shakspeare, have for once had the good fortune to approach closer to him than usual? It would still be more dangerous to rest on the similarity of separate passages to others in Shakspeare. This might rather arise from imitation. I rely therefore entirely on the historical statement, which, probably, originated in a tradition of the players. There are connoisseurs, who, in the pictures of Raphael, which, as is well known, were not always wholly executed by himself, take upon them to determine what parts have been painted by Francesco Penni, or Giulio Romano, or some other scholar. I wish them success with the nicety of their discrimination; they are at least secure from contradiction, as we have no certain information on the subject. I would only put these connoisseurs in mind, that Giulio Romano allowed himself to be deceived by a copy of Andrea del Sarto from Raphael, and that, too, with regard to a figure which he had himself assisted in painting. The case in point is, however, a much more complicated problem in criticism. The design of Raphael's figures was at least his own, and the execution only was distributed in part among his scholars. But to find out how much of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may belong to Shakspeare, we must not only be able to tell the difference of hands in the execution, but also to determine the influence of Shakspeare on the plan of the whole. When however he once joined another poet in the production of a work, he must also have accommodated himself, in a certain degree, to his views, and renounced the prerogative of unfolding his inmost



peculiarity. Amidst so many grounds for doubting, if I might be allowed to hazard an opinion, I should say, that I think I can perceive the mind of Shakspeare in a certain ideal purity, which distinguishes this piece above all the others of Fletcher, and in the conscientious fidelity with which the story adheres to that of Chaucer's *Palamon and Arcite*. In the style Shakspeare's hand is at first discoverable in a brevity and fulness of thought bordering on obscurity; in the colour of the expression, almost all the poets of that time bear a strong resemblance to each other. The first acts are most carefully laboured; afterwards the piece is drawn out in an epic manner to too great a length; the dramatic law of quickening the action, towards the conclusion, is not sufficiently observed. The part of the daughter of the jailor, whose insanity is artlessly conducted in pure monologues, is certainly not Shakspeare's; for, in that case, we must suppose him to have had an intention of arrogantly imitating his own Ophelia.

Moreover, it was then a very general custom for two or even three poets to join together in the production of one play. Besides the constant example of Beaumont and Fletcher we have many others. The consultations, respecting the plan, were generally held at merry meetings in taverns, where it happened upon a time, that one of such a party calling out in a poetical intoxication: "I will undertake to kill the King!" he was taken into custody as a traitor, till the misunderstanding was cleared up. This mode of composition may answer very well

for the lighter species, which must be animated by social wit. With regard to theatrical effect, four eyes may, in general, see better than two, and mutual objections may be of use in finding out the most suitable means. But the highest poetical inspiration is much more eremitical than communicative; for it always seeks the expression for something which sets language at defiance, which can only be weakened and dissipated by detached words, and which can only be attained by the united impression of the complete work, the idea of which hovers before it.

*The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, of Beaumont and Fletcher, is an incomparable and singular work in its kind. It is a parody of the chivalry romances; the thought is borrowed from Don Quixote, but the imitation is handled with freedom, and so particularly applied to Spencer's *Fairy Queen*, that it may pass for a second invention. But the peculiarly ingenious novelty of the piece consists in the combination of the irony of a chimerical abuse of poetry with another irony exactly the contrary, of the incapacity to comprehend any fable, and the dramatic form more particularly. A grocer and his wife come as spectators to the theatre: they are discontented with the piece which has just been announced; they demand a play in honour of the corporation, and Ralph, their apprentice, is to act a principal part in it. They are well received; but still they are not satisfied, make their observations on every thing, and incessantly address themselves to the players. Ben Jonson had already exhibited imaginary spectators,

but they were either benevolent expounders or awkward censurers of the views of the poet: consequently, they always conducted his, the poet's, own cause. But the grocer and his wife represent a whole genus, namely, those unpoetical spectators, who are destitute of a feeling for art. The illusion with them becomes a passive error; the subject represented has all the effect of reality on them, they therefore resign themselves to the impression of each moment, and take part for or against the persons of the drama. On the other hand, they show themselves insensible to all genuine illusion, that is, of entering vividly into the spirit of the fable: Ralph, however heroically and chivalrously he may conduct himself, is always for them Ralph their apprentice; and they take upon them, in the whim of the moment, to demand scenes which are quite inconsistent with the plan of the piece that has been commenced. In short, the views and demands with which poets are often oppressed by a prosaical public are personified in the most ingenious and amusing manner in these caricatures of spectators.

*The faithful Shepherdess*, a pastoral, is highly extolled by some English critics, as it is without doubt finished, with great diligence, in rhymed and, partly, in lyrical verses. Fletcher wished also to be classical for once, and did violence to his natural talent. Perhaps he had the intention of surpassing Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*; but the composition which he has ushered into the world is as heavy as that of the other was easy and ærial. The piece is overcharged with mythology

and rural paintings, is untheatrical, and so far from the genuine ideality of a pastoral world, that it even contains the greatest vulgarities. We might rather call it an immodest eulogy of chastity. I am willing to hope that Fletcher was unacquainted with the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, for otherwise his failure would admit of less justification.

We are here in want of room to speak in detail of the remaining works of Beaumont and Fletcher, although they might be made the subject of many instructive observations. On the whole, we may say of these writers that they have built a splendid palace, but merely in the suburbs of poetry, while Shakspeare has his royal residence in the central point of the capital.

The fame of *Massinger* has been lately revived by an edition of his works. Some literary men wish to rank him above Beaumont and Fletcher, as if he had approached more closely to the excellence of Shakspeare. I cannot find this. He appears to me to have the greatest resemblance to Beaumont and Fletcher in the plan of the pieces, in the tone of manners, and even in the language and negligences of versification. I would not undertake to decide, from internal symptoms, whether a play belonged to Massinger, or Beaumont and Fletcher. This applies also to the other contemporaries; for instance, to *Shirley*, of whom a couple of pieces are stated to have crept into the works ascribed to the two last named poets. There was then, as has already been said, a school of dramatic art in England, a school of which Shakspeare was the in-



visible and too often unacknowledged head ; for Ben Jonson remained almost without successors. It is a peculiarity of manner to efface the features of personal originality, and to make the productions of various artists bear a resemblance to each other ; and from manner no dramatic poet of this age, who succeeded Shakspeare, can be pronounced altogether free. When however we compare their works with those of the succeeding age, we shall perceive between them nearly the same relation as between the paintings of the school of Michel Angelo and those of the last half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. Both are tainted with manner ; but the manner of the former bears the trace of a sublime origin in the first ages ; in the latter, all is little, affected, empty, and superficial. I repeat it : in a general history of the dramatic art, the first period of the English theatre is the only one of importance. The plays of the least known writers of that time, (I venture to affirm this, though I am far from being acquainted with all of them) are more instructive for theory, and more remarkable, than the most celebrated of all the succeeding times.

In this condition nearly the theatre remained under the reign of Charles I. down to the year 1647, when the inveighings of the Puritans, who had long murmured at the theatre, and at last thundered loudly against it, were changed into laws. To act, or even behold, plays was prohibited under a severe penalty. A civil war followed, and the extraordinary circumstance here happened, that the players,

who, in general, do not concern themselves much about forms of government, and whose whole care is usually devoted to the peaceable entertainment of their fellow citizens, compelled by want, joined that political party the interests of which were intimately connected with their own existence. Almost all of them entered the army of the king, many perished for the good cause, the survivors returned to London and continued to exercise their art in secret. Out of the ruins of all the former companies of actors, one alone was formed, which occasionally, though with great circumspection, gave representations at the country seats of the great, in the vicinity of London. For among the other singularities to which the violence of those times gave rise, it was considered a proof of attachment to the old constitution to be fond of plays, and to reward and harbour those who acted them in private houses.

Fortunately the Puritans did not so well understand the importance of a censureship as the governments of our day, or the yet unprinted dramatic productions of the preceding age could not have issued from the press, by which means many of them would have been irrecoverably lost. These gloomy fanatics were such enemies of all that was beautiful, that they not only persecuted every liberal mental entertainment, calculated in any manner to adorn life, and more especially the drama as a public worship of Baal, but they even shut their ears to church music, as a demoniacal howling. If their ascendancy had maintained itself much longer, England must infallibly have been plunged in an

irremediable barbarousness. The oppression of the theatre continued down to the year 1660, when the free exercise of all arts returned with Charles the Second. *but his the nation's intrigue.*

The influence which the government of this monarch had on the manners and spirit of the time, and the natural re-action against the party before dominant, are sufficiently well known. As the Puritans had brought republican principles and religious zeal into universal odium, this light-minded Monarch seemed expressly born to sport away all respect for the kingly dignity. England was inundated with the foreign follies and vices in his train. The court set the fashion of the most undisguised immorality, and this example was the more extensively contagious, as people imagined that they showed their zeal for the new order of things by an extravagant way of thinking and living. The fanaticism of the republicans had been accompanied with true strictness of manners, and hence nothing appeared more convenient than to obtain the character of royalists, by the extravagant inclination for all lawful and unlawful pleasures. The age of Louis the Fourteenth was no where imitated with greater depravity. The prevailing gallantry at the court of France was not without reserve and without a tenderness of feeling; they sinned, if I may so speak, with some degree of dignity, and no man ventured to attack what was honourable, though his own actions might not exactly coincide with it. The English played a part which was altogether unnatural to them: they gave themselves heavily up to levity; they every where

confounded the coarsest licentiousness with free mental vivacity, and did not perceive that the sort of grace which is still compatible with depravity, disappears with the last veil which it throws off.

We may easily suppose the turn which the new formation of taste must have taken under such auspices. They possessed no real knowledge of the fine arts, and these were merely favoured like other foreign fashions and inventions of luxury. They neither felt a true want of poetry, nor had any relish for it: they merely wished to be entertained in a brilliant and light manner. The theatre, which in its former simplicity had attracted the spectators solely by the excellence of the dramatic works and the actors, was now furnished out with all the appendages with which we are at this day familiar; but what it gained in external decoration, it lost in internal worth.

To *Sir William Davenant* the English theatre, on its revival after the interruption which we have so often mentioned, owes the new institution, if this term may be here used. He introduced the Italian system of decoration, the *costume*, as well or ill as it was then understood, the opera music, and in general the use of the orchestra. For this undertaking Charles the Second had furnished him with extensive privileges. Davenant was a sort of adventurer and wit, and in every manner worthy of the royal favour, to enjoy which dignity of character was never considered as a necessary requisite. He set himself to work in every way which the want of a rich theatrical repertory may render necessary;



he made alterations of old pieces, wrote himself plays, operas, prologues, &c. But of all his writings nothing has escaped a merited oblivion.

*Dryden* soon became the hero of the stage, and remained so during a considerable time. This man, from his influence in fixing versification and diction, especially in rhyme, has acquired a reputation altogether disproportionate to his true merit. We shall not here inquire whether his translations of the Latin poets are not manneristical paraphrases, whether his political allegories, now that party interest is dead, can be read without the greatest wearisomeness; but his plays are, considered with reference to his great reputation, incredibly bad. *Dryden* had a flowing and easy versification, the knowledge which he possessed was rather considerable, but undigested, and all this was coupled with the talent of giving a certain appearance of novelty to what he borrowed from every quarter: his serviceable muse was the resource of an irregular life. He had besides an immeasurable vanity, he frequently disguises it under humble prologues, on other occasions he speaks out boldly and confidently, declaring that he is of opinion he has done better than Shakspeare, Fletcher, and Jonson (whom he places nearly on the same level); the merit of this however he was willing to ascribe to the refinement and advances of the age. The age indeed! as if that of Elizabeth compared with the one in which *Dryden* lived, were not in every respect "Hyperion to a Satyr!" *Dryden* played also the part of the critic: he furnished his pieces richly with prefaces and treatises

on dramatic poetry, in which he chatters in a confused manner about the genius of Shakspeare and Fletcher, and the entirely opposite example of Corneille, of the original boldness of the British stage, and the rules of Aristotle and Horace. He imagined that he had invented a new species, namely, the heroic drama; as if tragedy from its nature had not been always heroical! If we are however to seek for a heroic drama which is not peculiarly tragic, we shall find that it had long been possessed by the Spaniards in the greatest perfection. From the uncommon facility of rhyming which Dryden possessed, it cost him little labour to compose the most of his serious pieces entirely in rhyme. The rhymed verse of ten syllables supplies nearly, with the English, the place of the Alexandrine; it has more freedom in the pauses, but on the other hand it wants the alternation of male and female rhymes; it proceeds in pairs exactly like the French Alexandrine, and in point of syllabic measure it is still more uniformly symmetrical. It communicates therefore inevitably a great stiffness to the dialogue. The manner of the older English poets, who generally used blank verse, and only introduced occasional rhymes, was infinitely preferable. Since that time however rhyme has come to be too exclusively rejected.

Dryden's plans are improbable even to silliness; the incidents are all thrown out without thought; the most wonderful theatrical strokes fall incessantly from the clouds. He cannot be said to have drawn a single character; for there is not a spark of nature in

his persons. Passions, criminal and magnanimous sentiments, flow with indifferent levity from their lips without ever having dwelt in the heart: their chief delight is in heroical boasting. The tone of expression is by turns flat and madly bombastical, and frequently both at the same time: this poet resembles a man who walks upon stilts in a morass.—His wit is displayed in far-fetched sophistries; his imagination in long-spun similies awkwardly introduced. All these faults have been ridiculed by the Duke of Buckingham in his comedy of the *Rehearsal*. Dryden was meant under the name of Bayes, though some features are taken from Davenant and other contemporary writers. The vehicle of this critical satire might have been more artificial and diversified; the substance however is admirable, and the separate parodies are very amusing and ingenious. The taste for this depraved manner was, however, too prevailing to be restrained by the efforts of so witty a critic, who was at the same time a grandee of the kingdom.

*Otway* and *Lee* were younger competitors of Dryden in tragedy. Otway lived in poverty, and died young; under more favourable circumstances greater things perhaps would have been done by him. His first pieces in rhyme are imitations of the manner of Dryden; he also imitated the *Berenice* of Racine. Two of his pieces in blank verse have kept possession of the stage; *The Orphan*, and *Venice Preserved*. These tragedies are far from being good; but there is matter in them, especially in the last; and amidst much empty

declamation there are some truly pathetic passages. How little Otway understood the true rules of composition may be inferred from this, that he has taken the half of the scenes of his *Caius Marius* verbally, or with disfiguring changes, from the *Romeo and Juliet* of Shakspeare. Nothing more incongruous can well be conceived than such an episode in Roman manners and in a historical drama. This impudent plagiarism is in no manner justified by his confessing it.

Dryden altered pieces of Shakspeare; for then, and even long afterwards, every person thought himself qualified for this task. He also wrote comedies; but *Wycherley* and *Congreve* were the first to acquire a name in this species. The mixed romantic drama was now laid entirely aside; all was either tragedy or comedy. The history of each of these species will therefore admit of being separately handled; if that, where we can perceive no progressive developement, but mere standing still, or even retrograding and an inconstant fluctuation in all manner of directions, can be said to have a history. However, the English under Charles the Second and Queen Anne, and down to the middle of the eighteenth century, had a series of comic writers, who may be all considered as belonging to one common class; for the most important diversity among them proceeds merely from an external circumstance, the varying tone of manners.

I have elsewhere in these Lectures shown that elegance of form is of the greatest importance in comedy; as from the want of care in this respect it



is apt to dégenerate into a mere prosaical imitation of reality, by which it forfeits its pretensions to either poetry or art. It is exactly however in the form that the English comedies are extremely negligent. In the first place, they are written wholly in prose. It has been well remarked by an English critic, that the banishment of verse from comedy had even a prejudicial influence on versification in tragedy. The older dramatists could elevate or lower the tone of their Iambics at pleasure; from the exclusion of this verse from familiar dialogue it has become more pompous and inflexible. Shakspeare's comic scenes, it is true, are also written for the most part in prose; but in the mixed comedy, which has a serious, wonderful, or pathetic side, the prose with the elevated language of verse serves to mark the contrast between vulgar and ideal sentiments; it is a positive means of exhibition. Continued prose in comedy is nothing but the natural language, on which the poet has employed none of his skill in refining and smoothing down the apparently accurate imitation: it is that prose which Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* has been speaking his whole life-time without suspecting it.

Moreover, the English comic poets tie themselves too little down to the unity of place. I have on various occasions declared, that I consider change of scene even a requisite, whenever a drama is to possess historical extent, or the magic of romance. But in the comedy of common life it is something altogether different. I am convinced that it would almost always have had an advantageous influence

on the conduct of the action in the English plays if their authors had, in this respect, subjected themselves to stricter laws.

The lively trickery of the Italian masks has always found a more unfavourable reception in England than in France. The fool or clown in Shakspeare's comedies is much rather an ironical humorist than a mimical buffoon. Intrigue in real life is foreign to the Northern nations both from their virtues and their defects: they have too much openness of character, and too little acuteness and nicety of understanding. It is remarkable that the Southern nations, with greater violence of passion, possess however the talent of dissembling in a much higher degree. In the North, life is wholly founded on mutual confidence. Hence, in the drama, the spectators, from being less practised in intrigue, are less inclined to be delighted with concealment of views and their success by bold artifice, and with the presence of mind which extricates from embarrassment in unexpected events of an untoward nature. However, there may be an intrigue in comedy, in the dramatic sense, though none of the persons carry on what is properly called intrigue. In entangling and disentangling their plots, however, the English comic writers are least deserving of praise. Their plans are defective in unity. I conceive that I have sufficiently exculpated Shakspeare from this reproach, which is rather merited by many of the pieces of Fletcher. If, however, the imagination has any share in a composition, it is far from being so necessary that all should be accurately

connected together by cause and effect, as when the whole is merely held together by the understanding. The double or triple intrigue in many modern English comedies has been even acknowledged by English critics themselves.\* The inventions to which they have had recourse are often every thing but probable, without charming us by their happy novelty; they are chiefly deficient however in perspicuity and easy developement. The most of the English comedies are much too long. The authors overload their composition with characters; and we can see no reason why they have not divided them into several pieces. It is as if we were to compel to travel in the same stage-coach a greater number of persons, all strangers to each other, than there is properly room for: the journey becomes more inconvenient, and the entertainment not a whit more lively.

The greatest merit of the English comic poets of this period consists in the drawing of character; yet though many of them have certainly shown much talent in this respect, I cannot ascribe to any of them a peculiar genius for character. Even in this department the older poets (not only Shakespeare, for that may easily be supposed, but even Fletcher and Jonson) are superior to them. The

\* Among others, the anonymous author of an ingenious letter to Garrick, prefixed to Coxeter's edition of *Massinger's Works*, says:—"What with their plots, and double plots, and counter-plots, and under-plots, the mind is as much perplexed to piece out the story as to put together the disjointed parts of an ancient drama."

moderns seldom possess the faculty of seizing the most hidden and involuntary emotions, and giving a comic expression to them; they generally draw merely the natural or assumed surface of men. The same circumstance which was attended with such a prejudicial effect in France after Molière's time came also here into play. The comic muse, instead of becoming familiar with the way of living of the middle and lower ranks, her proper sphere, assumed an air of distinction: she squeezed herself into courts, and endeavoured to snatch a resemblance of the *beau-monde*. It was now no longer an English national, but a London comedy. The whole nearly turns on fashionable love-suits and fashionable raillery; the love affairs are either disgusting or insipid, and the raillery is always puerile and destitute of wit. These comic writers may have accurately hit the tone of their time; in this they did their duty; but they have reared a lamentable memorial of their age. In few periods has taste in the fine arts been at such a low ebb as about the close of the seventeenth and during the first half of the eighteenth century. The political machine kept its course: wars, negociations, and changes of states, give to this age a certain historical splendour; but the comic poets and portrait-painters have revealed to us the secret of its pitifulness; the former in their copies of the dresses, and the latter in the imitation of the social tone. I am convinced that if we could listen to the conversation of the *beau-monde* of that day in the present, it would appear to us as pettily affected and full of tasteless pretension, as the hoops, the towering head-



dresses, and high-heeled shoes of the women, and the huge peruques, cravats, wide sleeves, and ribbon-knots of the men.\*

The last, and not the least, defect of the English comedies is their offensiveness. I may sum up the whole in one word by saying, that after all we know of the licentiousness of manners under Charles the Second, we are still lost in astonishment at the audacious ribaldry of Wycherley and Congreve.—Decency is not merely violated in the grossest manner in single speeches, and frequently in the whole plot, but in the character of the rake, the fashionable debauchee, a moral scepticism is directly preached up, and marriage is the constant subject of their ridicule. Beaumont and Fletcher portrayed an irregular but vigorous nature: nothing however can be more repulsive than rude depravity coupled with claims to higher refinement. Under Queen Anne manners became again more decorous; and

\* When I give out good or bad taste in dress for an infallible criterion of social cultivation or deformity, this must be limited to the age in which a fashion comes up; for it may sometimes be very difficult to overturn a wretched fashion even when a better taste has long prevailed in other things. The dresses of the ancients were more simple, and consequently less subject to change of fashion; and the male dress, in particular, was almost unchangeable. However, even from the dresses alone, as we see them in the remains of antiquity, we may form a pretty accurate judgment of the character of the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. In the female portrait-busts of the time of the later Roman Emperors we often find the head-dresses extremely tasteless; nay, even busts with peruques which may be taken off, probably for the purpose of changing them, as the originals themselves did.

this may easily be traced in the comedies: in the series of English comic poets, *Wycherley*, *Congreve*, *Farquhar*, *Vanbrugh*, *Steele*, *Cibber*, &c., we may perceive something like a gradation from the most unblushing indecency to a tolerable degree of modesty. However, the example of the predecessors has had more than a due influence on the successors. From prescriptive fame pieces keep possession of the stage, such as no man in the present day durst venture to bring out. It is a remarkable phenomenon, the causes of which are deserving of mention, that the English nation in the last half of the eighteenth century passed all at once from the most opposite way of thinking to an almost over-scrupulous strictness of manners in social conversation, in romances and plays, and in the plastic arts.

Some writers have said of Congreve that he had too much wit for a comic poet. These people must have rather a singular conception of wit. The truth is, that Congreve and the other writers above mentioned possess in general much less comic than epigrammatic wit. The latter often degenerates into a laborious straining for wit. Steele's dialogue, for example, puts us too much in mind of the letters in the *Spectator*. Farquhar's plots seem to me to be of all of them the most ingenious.

The latest period of English comedy begins nearly with Colman. Since that time the morals have been irreproachable, and much has been done in refined and original characterization; the form, however, has on the whole remained the same, and

in that respect, I do not think the English comedies at all models.

Tragedy has been often attempted in England in the eighteenth century, but a genius of the first rank has never made his appearance. They laid aside the manner of Dryden, however, and that was certainly an improvement. Rowe was an honest admirer of Shakspeare, and his modest reverence for this superior genius was rewarded by a return to nature and truth. The traces of imitation are not to be mistaken: the part of Gloster in *Jane Shore* is even directly borrowed from *Richard the Third*. Rowe did not possess boldness and vigour, but sweetness and feeling; he could excite the softer emotions, and hence, in his *Fair Penitent*, *Jane Shore*, and *Lady Jane Gray*, he has successfully chosen female heroines and their weaknesses for his subject.

Addison possessed an elegant mind, but he was by no means a poet. He undertook to purify the English tragedy, by a compliance with the supposed rules of good taste. We might have expected from a judge of the ancients, that he would have endeavoured to approach the Greek models. Whether he had any such intention I know not, but certain it is, that he has produced nothing but a tragedy after the French cut. *Cato* is a feeble and frigid piece, almost destitute of action, without one truly overpowering moment. Addison has so narrowed a great and heroic picture by his timid manner of treating it, that he could not even fill up the frame without foreign intermixtures. Hence, he had

recourse to the traditional love intrigues; if we count well, we shall find no fewer than six persons in love in this piece: Cato's two sons, Marcia and Lucia, Juba and Sempronius. The good Cato cannot therefore avoid, as a provident father of a family, to arrange two marriages at the conclusion. With the exception of Sempronius, the villain of the piece, the lovers are one and all somewhat silly. Cato, who ought to be the soul of the whole, is hardly ever shown to us in action; nothing remains for him to do, but to admire himself and to die. It might be thought that the stoical determination of suicide, without struggle and without passion, is not a fortunate subject; but correctly speaking, no subjects are unfortunate, every thing depends on seizing each in the correct manner. Addison has been induced, by the wretched unity of place, to leave out Cæsar, the only worthy contrast to Cato; and, in this respect, even Metastasio has managed matters better. The language is pure and simple, but without vigour; the rhymeless Iambic gives more freedom to the dialogue, and an air somewhat less conventional than it has in the French tragedies; but in vigorous eloquence, Cato remains far behind them.

Addison took his measures well; he brought all the great and small critics, with Pope at their head, the whole militia of good taste under arms, that he might excite a high expectation of the piece which he had produced with so much labour. *Cato* was universally praised, as a work without an equal. And on what foundation do these boundless claims rest? On regularity of form? This had been already



observed by the French poets for nearly a century, and notwithstanding the constraint, they had often attained a much stronger pathetic effect. Or on the political sentiments? But in a single dialogue between Brutus and Cassius, in Shakspeare, there is more of a Roman way of thinking, and republican energy, than in all *Cato*.

I doubt whether this piece could ever have produced a powerful impression, but its reputation has certainly had a prejudicial influence on tragedy in England. The example of *Cato*, and the translations of French tragedies, which became every day more and more frequent, could not, it is true, render universal the belief in the infallibility of the rules; but they were held in sufficient consideration to disturb the conscience of the dramatic poets, and they therefore availed themselves of the prerogatives inherited by them from Shakspeare, with an extreme degree of timidity. On the other hand, these prerogatives were at the same time problems; it requires an extraordinary degree of skill to manage such great masses as Shakspeare used to bring together, with simplicity and perspicuity: more drawing and perspective are required for an extensive fresco painting, than for a small oil picture. In renouncing the intermixture of comic scenes when they no longer understood their ironical aim, they did perfectly right: Southern still attempted them in his *Oroonoko*, but they exhibit a wretched appearance in his hands. With the general knowledge and admiration of the ancients in England, we might have expected some attempt at a true imitation of

the Greek tragedy ; no such imitation has however made its appearance ; in the choice and handling of their materials, they show an undoubted affinity to the French. Some poets of celebrity in other departments of poetry, Young, Thomson, Glover, have written tragedies, but no one of them has displayed any true tragical talent.

They have now and then had recourse to familiar tragedy to assist the barrenness of imagination ; but the moral aim, which must exclusively prevail in this species, is a true extinguisher of genuine poetical inspiration. They have therefore been satisfied with a few attempts. *The Merchant of London*, and *The Gamester*, are the only plays in this way which have attained any considerable reputation. *The Merchant of London* is remarkable from having been praised by Diderot and Lessing, as a model deserving of imitation. This error could only have escaped from Lessing, in the keenness of his hostility to the French conventional tone. For in reality, we must perpetually bear in mind the honest views of Lillo, to prevent us from finding *The Merchant of London* as laughable as it is certainly trivial. Whoever possesses so little knowledge of the world and of men ought not to set up for a public lecturer on morals. We might draw a very different conclusion from this piece, from that which the author had in view, namely, that we ought to make young people early acquainted with prostitutes, to prevent them from entertaining a violent passion, and being at last led to steal and murder, for the first wretch who spreads her snares for them, (which they cannot

possibly avoid). Besides, I cannot approve of making the gallows first visible in the last scene; such a piece ought always to be acted with a place of execution in the back ground. With respect to the edification to be drawn from a drama of this kind, I should prefer the histories of malefactors, which are usually printed in England at executions; they contain, at least, real facts, instead of awkward fictions.

Garrick's appearance forms an epoch in the history of the English theatre, as he chiefly dedicated his talents to the great characters of Shakspeare, and built his own fame on the growing admiration for this poet. Before his time, Shakspeare had only been brought on the stage in mutilated and disfigured alterations. Garrick returned on the whole to the true originals, though he still allowed himself to make some very unfortunate changes. It appears to me, that the only alteration of Shakspeare which is excusable is, the leaving out a few things in conformity to the taste of the time. Garrick was undoubtedly a great actor. Whether he always conceived the parts of Shakspeare in the sense of the poet I should be inclined to doubt, from the very circumstances stated in the eulogies on his acting. He excited, however, a noble emulation to represent in a worthy manner the favourite poet of the nation; this has ever since been the highest object of the actors, and even at present they can boast of men whose histrionic talents are deservedly celebrated.

But why has this revival of the admiration of

Shakspeare remained unproductive for dramatic poetry? Because he has been too much the subject of astonishment, as an unapproachable genius who owed every thing to nature and nothing to art. His success, they think, is without example, and can never be repeated; nay, it is even forbidden to venture into the same region. Had they considered him more from the point of view which an artist ought to take, they would have endeavoured to understand the principles which he followed in his practice, and tried to become masters of them. A meteor appears, disappears, and leaves no trace behind; the course of a heavenly body, however, may be delineated by the astronomer, for the sake of investigating more accurately the laws of general mechanics.

I am not sufficiently acquainted with the latest dramatic productions of the English, to enter into a minute account of them. That the dramatic art and the taste of the public are, however, in a wretched decline, I think I may safely infer, from the following phenomenon. Some years ago, several German plays found their way to the English stage; plays, which it is true, are with us the favourites of the multitude, but which are not considered by the intelligent as forming a part of our literature, and in which distinguished actors are almost ashamed of earning applause. These pieces have met with extraordinary favour in England; they have properly speaking, as the Italians say, *fatto furore*, though the critics did not fail to declaim against their immorality, veiled over by sentimental hypocrisy. From the poverty of our dramatic literature, the



admission of such abortions into Germany may be easily comprehended ; but what can be alleged in favour of this depravity of taste in a nation like the English, which possesses such treasures, and which must therefore descend from such an elevation ? Certain writers are nothing in themselves ; they are merely symptoms of the disease of their age ; and were we to judge from them, there is but too much reason to fear that, in England, an effeminate sentimentality in private life is more frequent, than from the astonishing political greatness and energy of the nation we should be led to suppose.

May the romantic drama and the grand historical drama, these truly native species, be again speedily revived, and may Shakspeare find such worthy imitators as some of those whom Germany has to produce !

## LECTURE XIV.

Spanish Theatre.—Its three periods ; Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderon.—Spirit of the Spanish poetry in general.—Influence of the national history on it.—Form, and various species of the Spanish drama.—Decline since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

**T**HE riches of the Spanish stage have become proverbial, and it has been more or less the custom of the Italian French and English dramatists, to draw from this source, and generally without acknowledgment. I have often had occasion to remark this in the preceding lectures ; it was incompatible, however, with my purpose, to give an enumeration of what has been so borrowed, which would indeed have assumed rather a bulky appearance, and which could not have been rendered complete without great labour. What has been taken from the most celebrated Spanish poets may be easily pointed out ; but the writers of the second and third rank have been equally laid under contribution, and their works are not easily met with out of Spain. Ingenious boldness, joined to easy clearness of intrigue, is so exclusively peculiar to the Spanish dramatists, that I consider myself justified, whenever I find these in a work, to suspect a Spanish origin, even though the circumstance may have been unknown

to the author himself, who drew his plagiarism from a nearer source.\*

From the political preponderance of Spain in the sixteenth century, the knowledge of the Spanish language became widely diffused throughout Europe. Even in the first half of the seventeenth century we find many traces of an acquaintance with the Spanish literature in France, Italy, England, and Germany; since that time, however, the study of it has become every where more and more neglected, till of late some zeal has again been excited for it in Germany. In France they have no other idea of the Spanish theatre, than that which they may form from the translations of Linguet. These have been again translated into German, and their number has been increased by others, in no respect better, derived immediately from the originals. The translators have, however, confined themselves almost exclusively to the department of comedies of intrigue, and though all the Spanish plays are versified, with the exception of a few *Entremeses*, *Saynetes*, and those of the latest period, they have reduced the whole to prose, and even considered themselves entitled to praise for having carefully removed every thing which may be called poetical ornament. In such a mode of proceeding nothing but the material scaffolding of the original work could remain; the

\* Thus for example, *The Servant of two Masters*, of Goldoni, a piece highly distinguished above his others for the most amusing intrigue, passes for an original. A learned Spaniard has assured me, that he knows it to be a Spanish invention. Perhaps, Goldoni had here merely an older Italian imitation before him.

beautiful colouring must have disappeared with the forms of the execution. That translators who could show such a total want of judgment in poetical excellencies would not choose the best pieces in the whole store, may be easily supposed. The species in question, though the invention of innumerable intrigues, of a description of which we find but few examples in the theatrical literatures of other countries, certainly shows an astonishing acuteness, is yet by no means the most valuable part of the Spanish theatre, which displays a much greater brilliancy in the handling of wonderful, mythological, or historical subjects.

The selection published by *De la Huerta* in sixteen small volumes, under the title of *Teatro Hespañol*, with introductions giving an account of the authors of the pieces and the different species, can afford no very extensive acquaintance with the Spanish theatre, even to a person possessed of the language; for his collection is almost exclusively limited to the department of comedies in modern manners, and he has admitted no pieces of the earlier period, composed by Lope de Vega or his predecessors. Blankenburg and Bouterweek \* among us have laboured to throw light on the earlier history of the Spanish theatre, before it acquired its proper shape and attained literary dignity, a subject involved in a good deal of obscurity. But even at an after period, an amazing deal was written for the stage

\* The former in his annotations on *Sulzers Theorie der schönen Künste*, the latter in his *Geschichte der Spanischen Poesie*.



which never appeared in print, and which is either now lost or only exists in manuscript ; while, on the other hand, there is hardly an instance of a piece being printed without having first been brought on the stage. A correct and perfect history of the Spanish theatre can only therefore be executed in Spain. The notices of the above-mentioned German writers are however of use, though not free from errors ; their opinions respecting the poetical merit of the pieces, and the general view which they have taken, appear to me exceedingly objectionable.

The first advances of the dramatic art in Spain were made in the last half of the sixteenth century ; and it ceased to flourish with the end of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth, since the war of the succession, which seems to have had a very prejudicial influence on the Spanish literature in general, very little can be mentioned which does not display wild incoherency, retrogression, retention of the old observances without meaning, or tame imitations of foreign productions. The Spanish literati of the last generation frequently boast of their old national poets, the people entertain a strong attachment to them, and in Mexico, as well as Madrid, their pieces are always represented with impassioned applause.

The various epochs of formation of the Spanish theatre may be designated from the names of three celebrated writers, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderon.

The oldest information and opinions on this subject of any importance are to be found in the writings

of Cervantes ; chiefly in *Don Quixote*, in the dialogue with the Canon, in the preface to his later plays, in the journey to Parnassus. He has also thrown out detached observations on the subject in various other places. He had witnessed in his youth the commencement of the dramatic art in Spain ; the poetical poverty of which, as well as the low state of the theatrical decorations, are very humorously described by him. He was justified in looking upon himself as one of the founders of this art ; for before he gained immortal fame by his *Don Quixote* he had diligently laboured for the stage, and from twenty to thirty pieces composed by him, so negligently does he speak of them, had been acted with applause. He made no higher claims on that account, nor after they had served their momentary destination did he allow any of them to be printed ; and it was only lately that two of these earlier labours were for the first time published.— One of these plays, probably the first of Cervantes, *The Way of Living in Algiers* (*El Trato de Argel*), still bears traces of the infancy of the art in the preponderance of narrative, in the general meagreness, and in the want of prominency in the figures and situations. The other however, *The Destruction of Numantia*, stands altogether on the elevation of the tragical cothurnus ; and, from the unconscious and unsought-for approximation to antique grandeur and purity, forms a remarkable phenomenon in the history of modern poetry. The idea of destiny prevails in it throughout ; the allegorical figures which enter between the acts supply,

though in another way, nearly the place of the chorus in the Greek tragedies; they guide our consideration and propitiate our feeling. A great deed of heroic determination is completed; the extremity of suffering is endured with constancy; but it is the deed and the suffering of a whole nation whose individual members may be almost said to appear only as examples, while the Roman heroes seem merely the instruments of fate. There is, if I may say so, a sort of Spartan pathos in this piece: every separate consideration is swallowed up in the feeling for country; and by a reference to the modern warlike fame of his nation, the poet has contrived to connect the ancient history with the circumstances immediately before him.

Lope de Vega appeared, and soon became the sole monarch of the stage, so that Cervantes was forced to give way to him. Yet he would not altogether relinquish claims founded on earlier approbation; and shortly before his death, in the year 1615, he printed eight plays and an equal number of smaller interludes, as he could not get them brought on the stage. They have generally been found very much inferior to his other prose and poetical works; their modern editor is even of opinion that they are parodies and satires of the vitiated taste of the time: but we have only to read them without any prepossession to find this hypothesis ridiculous. Had Cervantes entertained such a purpose, he would have contrived to attain it in quite a different way in one piece, and also in a manner both highly amusing and not liable to mis-

conception. No, they were intended as pieces in the manner of Lope: Cervantes, contrary to his conviction, endeavoured to comply with the taste of his contemporaries by a display of greater variety, of wonderful plots, and theatrical effect. But it would appear that he considered the superficial in composition as the main requisite for applause; it is at least, for the most part, extremely loose and dissolute, and we have no examples in his prose works of a similar degree of levity. Hence, as he partly renounced his peculiar excellencies, we need not be astonished that he did not succeed in surpassing Lope in his own walk. Two, however, of these pieces, *The Christian Slaves in Algiers* (*Los Baños de Argel*), an alteration of the piece before mentioned, and *The Labyrinth of Love*, are deserving of great praise in their whole plot; all of them contain so many beautiful and ingenious traits, that when we consider them by themselves, and without any reference to the destruction of Numantia, we feel disposed to look on the opinion pretty generally entertained by the Spanish critics as a mere prejudice. But again, when we compare them with the pieces of Lope, or bear in mind the higher excellencies to which Calderon had accustomed his public, we shall find that this opinion will admit of conditional justification. We may, on the whole, allow that the mind of this poet was more inclined to the epic, taking the word in its more extensive signification, for the narrative form of composition; and that the soft and unassuming manner in which he delights to excite the mind



is not well suited to the making the most of every moment, and the rapid compression, which are required on the theatre. But when we again view the energetical pathos in *The Destruction of Numantia*, we must consider it as merely accidental that Cervantes did not dedicate himself wholly to this species, and find room in it for the developement of all the properties of his inventive mind.

The sentence pronounced by Cervantes on the dramas of his later contemporaries is one of the neglected voices which have been raised from time to time in Spain, insisting on the imitation of the ancient classics, while the national taste had decidedly declared itself for the romantic drama in its boldest form. On this subject Cervantes, from causes which we may easily comprehend, was not altogether impartial. Lope de Vega had followed him as a dramatic writer, and by his greater fruitfulness and brilliancy of effect had driven him from the stage; a circumstance which ought certainly to be taken into account in explaining the discontent of Cervantes in his advanced age with the direction of the public taste and the constitution of the theatre. It would appear, too, that in his poetical mind there still remained a prosaical corner from which he was induced to reject the inclination to the wonderful, and the boldness of plays of fancy, as contrary to probability and nature. On the authority of the ancients he recommended a purer separation of the species; whereas the romantic art endeavours to blend all the elements of poetry in its productions, as he himself did in his romances and

novels; and he censured with equal severity the rapid change of times and places as true offences against propriety. It is remarkable that Lope himself was unacquainted with his own rights, and confessed that he wrote his pieces, contrary to the rules with which he was well acquainted, merely for the sake of pleasing the multitude. That the multitude entered peculiarly into his consideration is certainly true; still he remains one of the most extraordinary of all the popular and favourite theatrical writers who ever lived, and well deserves to be called in all seriousness by Cervantes, his rival and adversary, a wonder of nature.

The pieces of Lope de Vega, numerous beyond all belief, have partly never been printed; and the collection of those that are printed is seldom to be found complete excepting in Spain. Many pieces are probably falsely attributed to him; an abuse of which Calderon also complains. I know not whether Lope himself ever gave any list of the pieces actually composed by him; indeed he could hardly at last have remembered the whole of them. However, on reading a small number we shall find ourselves pretty far advanced in our acquaintance with this poet; nor need we be afraid of having failed to peruse the most distinguished, as in his separate productions he does not surprise us by elevation of flight nor by laying open the unknown depths of his mind. This prolific writer, at one time too much idolized, at another too much depreciated, appears here undoubtedly in the most advantageous light, as the theatre was the best school for the

correction of his three great errors, want of connexion, diffuseness, and an unnecessary parade of learning. In some of his pieces, especially the historical founded on old romances and traditional tales, for instance, *King Wamba*, *The Youthful Tricks of Bernardo del Carpio*, *The Battlements of Toro*, &c. there prevails a certain rudeness, which is not however without character, and seems to have been purposely chosen for the subjects: in others, which portray the manners of his own time, as for instance, *The Lively Fair One of Tolédo*, *The Fair Deformed*, we may observe a highly cultivated social tone. All of them contain, along with truly interesting situations, a number of inimitable jokes; and there are perhaps very few of them which would not, if properly handled and adapted to our stages, produce a great effect in the present day. Their chief defects are, a profusion of injudicious invention, and negligence in the execution. They resemble the groupes which an ingenious sketcher scrawls on paper without any preparation and without even taking the necessary time; in which, notwithstanding this hasty levity, every line has its life and signification. Beside the want of careful finishing, the works of Lope are deficient only in depth, and in those finer relations which constitute the peculiar mysteries of the art.

If the Spanish theatre had not advanced farther, if it had possessed only the works of Lope and the more eminent of his contemporaries, as *Guillen de Castro*, *Montalban*, *Molina*, *Matos-Fragoso*, &c., we should have to praise it, much rather for

grandeur of design and for promising subjects than for matured perfection. But *Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca* now made his appearance, as prolific and diligent a writer as Lope, and a poet of a very different kind; a poet if ever any man deserved that name. The wonder of nature, the enthusiastic applause, and the sovereignty of the stage were renewed in a much higher degree. The years of Calderon keep equal pace with those of the seventeenth century; he was consequently sixteen when Cervantes, and thirty-five when Lope died, whom he survived nearly half a century. According to the account of his biographer, Calderon wrote more than a hundred-and-twenty plays, more than a hundred spiritual allegorical acts, a hundred merry interludes or *Saynetes*\* besides a number of

\* This account is perhaps somewhat rhetorical. The most complete and in every respect the best edition of the plays, that of *Apontes*, contains only a hundred-and-eight pieces. At the request of a great Lord, Calderon, shortly before his death, gave a list of his genuine works. He names a hundred-and-eleven plays; but among them there are considerably more than three which are not to be found in the collection of *Apontes*. Some of them may, indeed, be concealed under other titles, as, for instance, the piece, which Calderon himself calls, *El Tuzani de la Alpujarra*, is named in the collection, *Amar despues de la muerte*. Others are unquestionably omitted, for instance, a *Don Quixote*, which I should be particularly desirous of seeing. We may infer from many circumstances that Calderon had a great reverence for Cervantes. The collection of the *Autos sacramentales* contains only seventy-two, and several of them are not mentioned by Calderon. And yet he lays the greatest stress on these; wholly devoted to religion, he had become in his age more indifferent towards the temporal plays of his muse, although he did not reject them, and still continued to add to the number. It



poems which were not dramatical. As from his fourteenth to his eighty-first year, that in which he died, he continued to produce dramatic works, they divide themselves over a great space, and we cannot therefore suppose that he wrote with the same haste as Lope ; he had sufficient leisure to consider his plans maturely, which he also, without doubt, must have done. In the execution, he could not fail to possess great readiness from his extensive practice.

In this almost incalculable abundance of works, we find nothing thrown out at random ; all is finished, agreeably to the most secure and well founded principles, and with the most profound views of art. This cannot be denied even if we should mistake the pure and high style of the romantically-theatrical for manner, and consider these bold flights of poetry, on the extreme boundaries of the conceivable, as erroneous illusions. For Calderon has every where converted that into fresh material which passed with his predecessors for form ;—nothing less than the noblest and most exquisite flower could satisfy him. Hence it happens that he repeats himself in many expressions, images, comparisons, nay, even in many plays of situation ; for he was too rich to be under the necessity of borrowing from himself, not to mention from others. (The effect

might well be with him as with an excessively wealthy man, who, in a general computation, is apt to forget many of the items of his capital. I have never yet been able to see any of the *Saynetes* of Calderon ; I can even find no account whether or not they have been actually collected and printed.

on the stage is the first thing for Calderon; but this consideration, which is generally felt as a restraint, is uniformly positive with him. I know of no dramatist equally skilled in converting effect into poetry; at once so sensibly vigorous and so ethereal. >

His dramas divide themselves into four principal classes: compositions on sacred subjects taken from scripture and legends; historical; mythological, or from other fictitious materials; finally, pictures of social life in modern manners.

The pieces founded on the history of his own country only are historical in the more limited acceptance. The earlier periods of Spanish history have often been seized by Calderon with the utmost truth; but, in general, he had too decided, I might almost say, too burning a predilection for his own nation, to enter into the peculiarities of another; at most he could have portrayed what inclines towards the sun, the South and the East; but classical antiquity, as well as the North of Europe, were altogether foreign to his conception. Materials of this description he has, therefore taken wholly in a fanciful sense: the Greek mythology became, in general, a delightful tale in his hands, and the Roman history a majestic hyperbole.

The sacred compositions must, however, in some degree, be ranked as historical; for although surrounded with rich fiction, as is always the case in Calderon, they yet generally express the character of Biblical or legendary history with great fidelity. They are distinguished however from the other

historical pieces by the frequent prominence of a significant allegory, and by the religious enthusiasm with which the poet, in the spiritual acts destined for the celebration of the Corpus Christi festival, exhibits the universe, as it were, under an allegorical representation in the purple flames of love. In this last class he was most admired by his contemporaries, and here he himself set the highest value on his labours. But without having read, at least, one of them in a truly poetical translation, my auditors could not form the slightest idea of them; the consideration of these acts would demand a difficult investigation into the admissibility of allegory into dramatical composition. I shall therefore confine myself to those of his dramas which are not allegorical. The characterization of these I shall be very far from exhausting; I can merely exhibit a few of their more general features.

Of the great multitude of ingenious and acute writers, who were then drawn by the dazzling brilliancy of the stage into the theatrical career, the most were merely imitators of Calderon; a few deserve to be named along with him, as *Don Agustin Moreto*, *Don Franzisco de Roxas*, *Don Antonio de Solis*, the acute and eloquent historian of the conquest of Mexico, &c. The dramatic literature of the Spaniards can even boast of a royal poet, the great patron and admirer\* of Calderon,

\* This monarch seems, in reality, to have had a relish for the peculiar excellence of his favourite poet, whom he considered as the brightest ornament of his court. He was so pre-possessed in favour of the national drama, that he refused to allow the in-

to whom several anonymous pieces, with the epigraph *de un ingenio de esta corte*, are ascribed. All the writers of that day wrote in a kindred spirit; it was a true school of art. Many of them have peculiar excellencies, but Calderon in boldness, fullness, and profundity, soars beyond them all; in him the romantic drama of the Spaniards attained the summit of perfection.

We shall endeavour to give a feeble idea of the spirit and form of these compositions, differing so widely from every other European production. For this purpose however we must enter in some measure into the character of the Spanish poetry in general, and those historical circumstances by which it has been determined.

The beginnings of the Spanish poetry are extremely simple: its two fundamental forms were the *romanze* and the song, and we every where imagine we hear the accompaniment of the guitar in these original national-melodies. The *romanze*, which is half Arabian in its origin, was at first a simple heroic tale; afterwards it became a very artificial species, adapted to various uses, but in which the picturesque ingredient always predominated, and sometimes displayed the most brilliant luxuriance of colours. The song again, almost destitute of imagery, expressed

production of the Italian opera, which was then in general favour at the different European courts: an example which deserves to be held up to the German Princes, who have hitherto, from indifference towards every thing national, and partiality for every thing foreign, done all in their power to discourage the German poets.



tender feelings in ingenious turns ; it extends its sportiveness to the very limits where the self-meditation, which endeavours to convert an inexpressible disposition of mind into thought, wings again the thought to visionary anticipation. The forms of the song were diversified by the introduction into poetry of what is effected in music by variation. Still however the rich properties of the Spanish language could not fully develope themselves in these species of poetry, which were rather tender and infantine than elevated. Hence towards the beginning of the sixteenth century they adapted the more comprehensive forms of the Italian poetry, *Ottave, Terzine, Canzoni, Sonetti* ; and the Castilian language, the proudest daughter of the Latin, was then first enabled to display her whole power in dignity, beautiful boldness, and splendour of imagery. The Spanish is less soft than the Italian on account of the guttural sound, and the frequent termination with consonants ; but its tones are, if possible, more full, proceed still more from the breast, and fill the ear with a pure metallic resonance. It had not yet altogether lost the rough strength and cordiality of the Goths, when oriental intermixtures gave it a wonderful degree of sublimity, and elevated a poetry, intoxicated as it were with aromatic vapours, far above all the scruples of the sober west.

The stream of poetical inspiration, swelled by every proud consciousness, increased with the growing fame in arms of this formerly so free and heroic nation. The Spaniards act a glorious part in the history of the middle ages, a part but too much for-

gotten by the envious ingratitude of modern times. They were then the forlorn out-post of Europe ; they lay on their Pyrenean peninsula as in a camp, exposed to the incessant eruptions of the Arabians, always ready for renewed conflicts without foreign assistance. The foundation of their Christian kingdom, for centuries, from the time when the descendants of the Goths, who had been driven back into the northern mountains, again rushed forth from these places of refuge, down to the complete expulsion of the Moors from Spain, was one single and long continued adventure ; nay, the preservation of Christianity in that land against such a preponderating power, seemed even to be the wondrous work of more than mere mortal guidance. Always accustomed to fight at the same time for his liberty and his religion, the Spaniard clung to the latter with a fiery zeal, as an acquisition dearly purchased by the noblest blood. Every consolation of divine worship was a reward of heroic exertion ; every church might be considered by him as a trophy of his ancestors. True to his God and his king to the last drop of his blood ; adhering inviolably to his honour ; proud, yet humble before every thing accounted holy ; serious, moderate, and modest ; such was the character of the old Castilian : and yet we now ridicule this worthy people because they could not bring themselves to lay aside the beloved sword, the instrument of their high calling, even when behind the plough.

Of the love of war which so many circumstances had thus served to keep alive, and the spirit of enter-

prise of their subjects, the monarchs of Spain availed themselves at the close of the fifteenth and during the sixteenth century in their attempts to attain universal monarchy; and while the Spanish arms were thus employed to effect the subjugation of other nations, the people themselves were deprived of their own political freedom. The faithless and tyrannical policy of Philip the Second has unmeritedly drawn down on the nation the hatred of foreigners. The Macchiavelism of the princes and popular leaders in Italy was a universal character, all ranks were infected with the same love of artifice and fraud; but in Spain this can only be laid to the charge of the Government, and even the religious persecutions seldom or never proceeded from the out-breakings of a universal popular fury. The Spaniard never presumed to examine into the conduct of his spiritual and worldly superiors, and carried on their wars of aggression and ambition with the same fidelity and bravery which he had formerly displayed in his own wars of defence. Personal fame, and a supposed zeal for religion, blinded him with respect to the justice of his cause. Unexampled enterprises were successfully executed, a newly discovered world beyond the ocean had been subjugated by a handful of bold adventurers; individual instances of cruelty and avarice had stained the splendour of the most determined heroism, but the mass of the nation remained uninfected by this degeneracy. The spirit of chivalry has no where outlived its political existence so long as in Spain. Long after the internal prosperity, together with the

foreign influence of the nation, had experienced a deep decline in consequence of the ruinous errors of Philip the Second, this spirit propagated itself down to the flourishing period of their literature, and imprinted its stamp upon it in a manner which cannot be mistaken. Here was renewed in a certain degree, though with much higher mental cultivation, the dazzling appearance of the middle ages, when princes and lords employed themselves in the composition of songs of love and heroism, when the knights, with their hearts full of their mistresses, and devotion to the holy sepulchre, exposed themselves joyfully to the most dangerous adventures in their pilgrimages to the promised land, when even a lion-hearted king touched the tender lute to sounds of amorous lamentation. The Spanish poets were not, as was usual in other European countries, courtiers, scholars, or engaged in some civil employment; of noble birth for the most part, they led a warlike life. The union of the sword and the pen, of the exercise of arms and the nobler mental arts, was their watch-word. Garcilaso, one of the founders of the Spanish poetry under Charles the Fifth, descended from the Peruvian Yncas, accompanied by his amiable muse to Africa, fell before the walls of Tunis; Camoens the Portuguese, sailed as a soldier to the remotest Indies, in the track of the glorious discoverer whom he celebrated; Don Alonso de Ercilla composed his *Araucana* during a war with revolted savages, in a tent at the foot of the Cordilleras, or in wildernesses yet untrodden by men, or in a ship tossed about on the ocean; Cervantes



purchased the honour of having combated in the battle of Lepanto as a common soldier, under the great John of Austria, with the loss of an arm, and a long slavery in Algiers; Lope de Vega, among other things, survived the misfortunes of the invincible flotilla; Calderon performed campaigns in Flanders and Italy, fulfilled his warlike duties as a knight of Santiago till he entered into holy orders, and thus gave external evidence that religion was the ruling motive of his life.

If the feeling of religion, true heroism, honour, and love, are the foundation of the romantic poetry, born and grown up in Spain under such auspices, it could not fail to assume the highest elevation. The fancy of the Spaniards was bold like their active powers, no mental adventure seemed too dangerous for it. The predilection of the people for the most extravagantly wonderful had already been shown in the chivalry romances. They wished to see the wonderful once more on the stage; and when their poets, standing on a high eminence of cultivation in art and social life, gave it the requisite form, breathed into it a musical soul, and wholly purified it from corporeal grossness to colour and fragrance, there arises, from the very contrast of the subject and the form, an irresistible fascination. Their spectators imagined they perceived a refulgence of the world-conquering greatness of their nation, now half lost, when all the harmony of the most varied metre, all the elegance of fanciful allusion, all the splendour of imagery and comparison which their language alone could afford, were poured

out into inventions always new, and almost always pre-eminently distinguished for their ingenuity.—The treasures of the most distant zones were procured in fancy, as well as reality, for the gratification of the mother country and we may say that in the dominion of this poetry, as in that of Charles the Fifth, the sun never set.

Even those plays of Calderon in modern manners, which descend the most to the tone of common life, still fascinate us by a sort of fanciful magic, and cannot be considered altogether in the light of comedies in the usual acceptation of the word. We have seen that the comedies of Shakspeare are always composed of two parts, foreign to each other: the comic, which is true to English manners, as comic imitation requires local determination; and the romantic, transported to some southern scene, as the native soil was not sufficiently poetical for that purpose. In Spain again the national costume of that day was susceptible of being still exhibited in an ideal manner. This could not indeed have been possible, had Calderon introduced us into the interior of domestic life, where want and habit generally reduce all things to every-day narrowness. The comedies end like those of the ancients, with marriages; but how different what precedes! There, for the gratification of sensual passions and selfish views, the most immoral means are often put in motion, human beings stand opposed to each other with their mental powers as mere physical beings, and endeavour to pry into their mutual weaknesses. Calderon represents to us his principal characters

of both sexes in the first ebullitions of youth, it is true; but the aim after which they strive, and in the prosecution of which every thing else kicks the beam, is never confounded in their mind with any other good. Honour, love, and jealousy, are uniformly the motives; the plot arises out of their daring but noble collision, and is not purposely instigated by knavish deception. Honour is always an ideal principle; for it rests, as I have elsewhere shown, on that higher morality which consecrates principles without regard to consequences. It may sink down to a mere social coincidence with certain opinions or prejudices, to a mere instrument of vanity, but even when so disfigured we may still recognize in it the shadow of a sublime idea. I know no apter symbol of the manner in which the tender sensibility of honour is portrayed by Calderon, than the fabulous story of the ermine, which sets such high value on the whiteness of its skin, that rather than stain it, on being pursued by the hunters, it yields itself up to destruction. This feeling for honour is equally powerful in the female characters; it rules over love, which is only allowed a place beside it, but not above it. The honour of the women consists, according to the manner of thinking of the dramas of Calderon, in loving only one man of pure and unspotted honour, and loving him with perfect purity, in entertaining no sort of ambiguous devotion, which approaches within too great nearness of the most severe female dignity. Love requires inviolable secrecy till a lawful union permits it to be publicly declared. This secrecy

secures it from the poisonous intermixture of vanity, which would boast of pretensions or conceded favours; it gives it the appearance of a vow, which from its mystery is the more sacredly observed. In this morality, it is true, cunning and dissimulation are allowed for the sake of love, and in so far honour may be said to be infringed on; but the most delicate regards are notwithstanding observed in the collision with other duties; with those of friendship for example. The power of jealousy, always alive and often breaking out in a dreadful manner, not like that of eastern countries, a jealousy of possession, but of the slightest emotions of the heart and its most imperceptible demonstrations, serves to ennoble love, as this feeling whenever it is not altogether exclusive sinks beneath itself. The perplexity to which the collision of all these mental motives gives rise frequently ends in nothing, and then the catastrophe is truly comic; sometimes, however, it takes a tragic turn, and then honour becomes a hostile destiny for him who cannot satisfy it without either annihilating his own felicity or becoming even a criminal.

This is the higher spirit of the dramas, which by foreigners are called pieces of intrigue; in Spanish, they are called from the dress in which they are acted, comedies of cloak and sword (*Comedias de capa y espada*). They have commonly no other burlesque part than the character of a merry servant, known by the name of the *Gracioso*. This servant chiefly serves to parody the ideal motives from which his master acts, and this he



frequently does in the most elegant and witty manner. He is seldom used as an efficient lever to establish by his artifices the intrigue, in which we rather admire the wit of accident than of contrivance. Other pieces are called *Comedias de figuron*; the remaining figures are usually the same with those in the former class, only there is always one drawn in caricature which occupies a prominent place in the composition. We cannot refuse the name of pieces of character to many of the dramas of Calderon, although we must not expect the most delicate characterisation from the poets of a nation in which the violence of passion and an exalted fancy neither leave sufficient leisure nor sufficient coldness of blood for the designs of prying observation.

Another class of his pieces is called by Calderon himself, festal dramas (*fiestas*). They were destined for representation at court on solemn occasions; and though they require the theatrical pomp of frequent change of decoration and visible wonders, and though music is also often introduced into them, still we may call them poetical operas, that is, dramas which, by the mere splendour of poetry, perform what in the opera can only be attained by the machinery, the music, and the dancing. Here the poet gives himself wholly up to the boldest flight of his fancy, and his creation hardly touches the earth.

His mind, however, is most distinctly expressed in the religious subjects which he handled. He paints love with general features merely, he speaks her technical poetical language. Religion is his

peculiar love, the heart of his heart. For religion alone he excites the most overpowering emotions, which penetrate into the inmost recesses of the soul. It would rather appear that he did not wish to enter with the same fervour into worldly events. However turbid they may be in themselves, from the religious medium through which he views them, they appear to him perfectly bright. This fortunate man escaped from the wild labyrinths of doubt into the citadel of belief, from whence he viewed and portrayed the storms of the world with undisturbed tranquillity of soul; human life was to him no longer a dark riddle. Even his tears reflect the image of heaven, like dew drops on a flower in the sun. His poetry, whatever its object may apparently be, is an incessant hymn of joy on the majesty of the creation; he celebrates the productions of nature and human art with an astonishment always joyful and always new, as if he saw them for the first time in an unworn festal splendour. It is the first awaking of Adam, coupled with an eloquence and skill of expression, with a thorough acquaintance with the most mysterious relations of nature, such as high mental cultivation and mature contemplation can alone give. When he compares the most remote, the greatest and the smallest, stars and flowers, the sense of all his metaphors is the mutual attraction of created things to one another on account of their common origin, and this delightful harmony and unity of the world is again with him merely a refulgence of the eternal love which embraces the universe.

Calderon still flourished at a time when a strong inclination began to manifest itself in the other countries of Europe, to that mannerism of taste in the arts, and those prosaic views in literature, which in the eighteenth century obtained such universal dominion. He is consequently to be considered as the last summit of the romantic poetry. All its magnificence is lavished in his works, as in fireworks, the most gaudy colours, the most dazzling cascades and circles, are usually reserved for the last explosion.

The Spanish theatre continued to be cultivated in the same sense, for nearly a generation after Calderon. All, however, which was produced in that time may be considered as a mere echo of the preceding productions, and nothing new and truly peculiar appeared, which deserves to be named after Calderon. A great barrenness is afterwards perceptible. Single attempts have been made to produce regular tragedies, that is to say, after the French cut. Even the declamatory drama of Diderot has found its imitators. I recollect having read a Spanish play, the object of which was to recommend the abolition of the torture. The exhilaration to be expected from such a work may be easily conceived. Those Spaniards who are runaways from their old national taste extol highly the prosaical and moral dramas of Moratin; but we see no reason for seeking in Spain what we have as good, or, more correctly speaking, equally bad at home. The majority of the spectators have preserved themselves tolerably exempt from those foreign influences;

when a *bel esprit* undertook a number of years ago to reduce a justly admired piece of Moreto (*El parecido en la corte*) to a conformity with the three unities, the pit at Madrid were thrown into such a commotion, that the players could only appease them by announcing the piece for the next day in its genuine shape.

When external circumstances, for instance, the influence of the clergy, the oppression of the censure, and even the jealous vigilance of the people for the preservation of their old manners, oppose in any country the introduction of what passes in neighbouring states for a progress in mental cultivation, it frequently happens that the better description of heads will entertain an undue longing for the forbidden fruit, and that they first begin to admire some depravity in art, when it has elsewhere ceased to be fashionable. Certain mental maladies are so epidemical in an age, that a nation never can be secure from infection till it has once been inoculated. However, the Spaniards it would appear, with respect to the passive illumination of the last generation, have come off with the chicken pox, while the disfiguring variolous scars are but too visible in the features of other nations. Living nearly in an insular situation, they have slept the eighteenth century, and how could they in the main have applied their time better? Should the Spanish poetry again awake in old Europe, or in the other hemisphere, it would certainly have a step to make, from instinct to consciousness. What the Spaniards have hitherto loved from native inclination, they



must learn to reverence on clear principles, and, unconcerned at the criticism which has in the interval sprung up, proceed to fresh creations in the spirit of their great poets.

## LECTURE XV.

Origin of the German theatre.—Hans Sachs.—Gryphius.—The age of Gottsched.—Wretched imitation of the French.—Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller.—Review of their works.—Their influence on chivalrous dramas, affecting dramas, and family pictures.—Prospect for futurity.

**I**N its cultivated state, the German theatre is much younger than any of those of which we have already spoken, and we are not therefore to wonder, if the store of our literature in valuable original works, in this department, is also much more scanty.

Little more than half a century ago, the German literature was at the very lowest ebb in point of talent, and since that time when greater exertions first began to be made, the Germans have proceeded with gigantic strides. If the dramatic art has not been cultivated with the same success, and I may add with the same zeal, as other departments, the cause must rather perhaps be attributed to a number of unfavourable circumstances than to any want of talents.

The rude beginnings of the stage with us are as old as in other countries.\* The oldest drama

\* The first mention of the mysteries or spiritual representations in Germany, with which I am acquainted, is to be found in the *Eulen-spiegel*. We may see this merry, but somewhat disgusting trick, of the celebrated buffoon, in the 13th History; "How Eulen-spiegel made a play in the Easter fair, in which the priest

which we have in writing is the production of one Hans Rosenpluet, a native of Nuremberg, about the middle of the fifteenth century. He was followed by two fruitful writers born in the same Imperial city, Hans Sachs and Ayrer. In the works of Hans Sachs we find a great multitude of tragedies, comedies, spiritual and temporal histories, where the prologue and epilogue are always spoken by the herald, besides merry carnival plays. The above, it appears, were all acted, not by players, but by respectable citizens, as an allowable relaxation for the mind, without any theatrical apparatus. The carnival plays are somewhat coarse, but not unfrequently extremely droll, as the jokes in general are; they often run into the wildest farce, and, inspired by mirth and drollery, leave the bounds of the world of reality behind them. The composition in all these plays is respectable, and does not contain many circumlocutions: all the characters, from God the Father downwards, state at once in clear terms what they have at heart, and the reasons for which they make their appearance; they resemble those figures in old pictures who have written labels in their mouths, to assist the defective expression of the attitudes. The form approaches most to what was elsewhere called moralities; allegorical personages frequently appear. The sketch of the dramatic art, yet in its infancy, is feebly but not falsely drawn;

and his maid servant fought with the boors." Eulen-spiegel is stated to have lived towards the middle of the fourteenth century, but the book cannot be placed farther back than the beginning of the fifteenth.

and if we had only proceeded in the same path, we should have produced something better and more characteristic than the fruits of the seventeenth century.

In the first half of this century, poetry left the circle of common life to which it had so long been confined, and fell into the hands of the learned. Opiz, who may be considered as the founder of its modern form, translated several tragedies from the ancients into verse, and composed pastoral operas after the manner of the Italians; but I know not whether he wrote any thing expressly for the stage. He was followed by Andreas Gryphius, who may be styled our first dramatic writer. He possessed a certain extent of literary knowledge in his department, as is proved by several of his imitations and translations; a piece from the French, one from the Italian, a tragedy from the Flemish of Vondel; lastly, a farce called *Peter Squenz*, an extension of the burlesque tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, in *The Midsummer Night's Dream* of Shakspeare. The latter was then almost unknown beyond his own island; the learned Morhof, who wrote in the last half of the seventeenth century, confesses that he had never seen Shakspeare's works, though he was very well acquainted with Ben Jonson. Even about the middle of last century, a writer of estimation in those days, and not without merit, has in one of his treatises instituted a comparison between Shakspeare and Andreas Gryphius; the whole resemblance consisted in this, that Gryphius was also fond of calling up the spirits of the departed.



He seems rather to have had Vondel, the Fleming, before his eyes, a writer still highly celebrated by his countrymen, and universally called by them, the great Vondel, while Gryphius himself has been consigned to oblivion. Unfortunately the metre in the plays of Gryphius is the Alexandrine; the form, however, is not so confined as that of the French at an after period; the scene sometimes changes, and the interludes, partly musical, partly allegorical, bear some resemblance to the English masks. In other respects he possesses little theatrical skill, and I do not even know if these pieces were ever actually brought on the stage. The tragedies of Lohenstein, who may be styled the Marino of our literature of that day, resemble those of Gryphius in their cut, but without mentioning their other faults, they are of such an immeasurable length as to set all representation at defiance.

The pitiful condition of the theatre in Germany at the end of the seventeenth and during the first third part of the eighteenth century, wherever there was any other stage than that of puppet-shows and mountebanks, exactly corresponded to that of the other departments of our literature. We have a standard for this wretchedness, when we consider that Gottsched could pass for the restorer of our literature; Gottsched, whose writings resemble a watery beverage, such as was then usually recommended to patients in a state of convalescence, from an idea that they could bear nothing stronger, by which means their stomach became still more enfeebled. Gottsched, among his other labours,

composed a great deal for the theatre; connected with a certain Madam Neuber, who was at the head of a company of players in Leipzie, he discarded Punch (Hanswurst), and they buried him solemnly with great triumph. I am willing to believe that the parts of Punch, of which we may even yet form a judgment from puppet-shows, were not always ingeniously filled up extemporarily, and that many flat things might occasionally be uttered by him; but still Punch had undoubtedly more sense in his little finger, than Gottsched in his whole body. Punch, as an allegorical personage, is immortal; and however strong the belief of his burial may be, he yet pops unexpectedly upon us in some grave office-bearer or other almost every day.

Gottsched and his school now inundated the German theatre, which was hereafter to be regular by means of insipid and diffuse translations from the French. Heads of a better description began to labour for the stage; but instead of producing real original works, they brought forth only wretched imitations; and the reputation of the French theatre was so great that the most contemptible mannerism was as much laid hold of as the fruits of a better taste. Thus, for example *Gellert* still composed pastoral plays after bad French models, in which shepherds and shepherdesses, with rose-red and apple-green ribbands, uttered all manner of insipid compliments to one another.

Besides the French comedies, those translated from the Danish of *Holberg*, were acted with great applause. This writer has certainly great merit.

His pictures of manners possess great local truth ; his exhibition of depravity, folly, and stupidity, rest on an extremely good foundation ; in strength of comic motives and situations he is not defective ; he is merely not very inventive in his intrigues. The execution runs too much out into breadth. The Danes speak in the highest terms of the delicacy of his jokes in their own language ; the vulgarity of his tone is revolting to our present taste, but in the low sphere in which he moves, and in which there are incessant storms of cudgellings, it may be natural enough. Attempts have lately been made to revive him, but seldom with any great success. As his principal merit consists in his characterization, which is certainly somewhat caricatured, he requires good comic actors to appear with any advantage.

A few of the plays of that time, in the manners of our own country, by *Gellert* and *Elias Schlegel*, are not without merit ; only they have this error, that in drawing folly and stupidity the same wearisomeness has crept into their picture which accompanies them in real life.

In tragedies, properly so called, after French models, the first who were in any degree successful were *Elias Schlegel*, and afterwards *Cronegk* and *Weisse*. I know not whether their labours, if translated into good French verse, would appear as frigid to us as they do in German. It is insufferable to us to read verses of an ell long, in which the style seldom rises above watery prose ; the truly poetical expression was first created in German at a subsequent period. The Alexandrine, which in no

language, can be a good metre, is doubly stiff and heavy in ours. *Gotter*, long after our poetry had again begun to take a higher flight, in the translation of French tragedies, made the last attempt to enoble the Alexandrine and procure its re-admission into tragedy, and proved, as it appears to me by his example, that we must for ever renounce every such idea. It serves admirably, however, for a parody of the stilted style of false tragical emphasis; its use, too, is much to be recommended in comedy, especially in small afterpieces. Those earlier tragedies, after the French cut, which however met with uncommon applause in their day, show how little hope we can have of the progress of art in the way of slavish imitation. Even a form, narrow in itself, when it has been established under the influence of a national way of thinking, has still some signification; but when it is blindly taken on trust in other countries, it becomes altogether a Spanish mantle.

Thus bad translations of French comedies, with pieces from Holberg, and afterwards Goldoni, and with a few German imitations of a feeble nature, and without any peculiar spirit, constituted the whole repertory of our stage, till at last Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, successively appeared and redeemed the German theatre from its long continued mediocrity.

*Lessing*, however, in his earlier dramatic labours, paid the tribute due to his age. His youthful comedies are rather insignificant; they do not yet announce the distinguished head who was to form an epoch in so many departments. He sketched



several tragedies according to the French rules, and executed several scenes in Alexandrines, but he finished none: it would appear that he could not manage so difficult a verse with the requisite ease. Even his *Miss Sara Sampson* is a familiar tragedy in the lacrymose and creeping style, in which we evidently perceive that he had the *Merchant of London* before his eyes as a model. In the year 1767, his connexion with a company of actors in Hamburg, and a periodical paper dedicated to theatrical criticism, which he conducted, gave him an opportunity of entering more closely into the consideration of the theatre. He displayed in this paper great wit and acuteness, his bold, nay, considering the opinion which was then prevalent, hazardous attacks, were particularly triumphant over the dominion of the French taste in the tragical department, which had merely been forced upon us. His labours were attended with such success, that, shortly after the publication of his *Dramaturgie*, the translations of French tragedies, and the German tragedies modelled after them, disappeared from the stage. He was the first who spoke with warmth of Shakspeare, and paved the way for his appearance. But his belief in Aristotle, with the influence which Diderot's writings had had on him, produced a singular mixture in his theory of the dramatic art. He was unacquainted with the rights of poetical imitation, and wished in dialogue, as well as every thing else, a naked copy of nature, as if this was, in general, allowable or even possible in the fine arts. His attack of the Alexandrine was just,

but he wished to abolish all versification, and in this indeed he was but too successful; for it is to him that we have to impute the incredible falling off of our players in the getting by heart and delivering of verse. Even yet they cannot habituate themselves to it. He was thus mediately the cause of the insipid affectation of nature of our Dramatic writers, which the general use of versification would, in some degree, have restrained.

Lessing, by his own confession, was no poet, and, in his riper years, he produced merely a few dramatic works with great labour. *Minna von Barnhelm* is a true comedy of the more refined description; in point of form it holds a middle place between the French and English manner; the spirit of the invention however, the social tone portrayed in it, are peculiarly German. Every thing is even locally determined; and the allusions to the memorable circumstances of the seven years' war contributed not a little to the extraordinary success which this comedy at that time obtained. The serious part is not free from affectation in the expression of feeling, and the relation of the two lovers is brought forward even to a painful degree. The comic secondary figures are drawn with much drollery and humour, and bear a genuine German stamp.

*Emilia Galotti* obtained still more admiration than *Minna von Barnhelm*, but I know not whether altogether justly. The former is perhaps planned with more consideration, and executed with still greater diligence than the other; but *Minna von Barnhelm* answers better to the genuine idea of

comedy than *Emilia Galotti* to that of tragedy. Lessing's theory of the dramatic art had, as we may easily conceive, a much less prejudicial influence on a demi-prosaical species than upon one which inevitably sinks beneath itself, when it does not take the highest flight. He was now too well acquainted with the world to fall again into the drawing lacrymose and sermonising tone which prevails throughout *Miss Sara Sampson*. On the other hand, his sound sense, notwithstanding all his admiration of Diderot, preserved him from his declamatory and emphatical style, which owes its chief effect to marks of interrogation and hyphens. But as he resolutely rejected all poetical elevation of dialogue, he could not escape this manner without falling into another. He introduced the cool and prying observation of the comic writer into the region of tragedy; the passions in *Emilia Galotti* are rather acutely and wittily characterised than eloquently expressed. In the belief that the drama is most powerful when it exhibits faithful copies of what we know and what is near to us, Lessing has disguised an old and celebrated deed of rough Roman virtue indelibly entered in the history of the world, the murder of Virginia by her father, under fictitious names, in modern European relations, and in the manners of the present times. Virginia was converted into a countess Galotti, Virginus into Count Odoardo; an Italian Prince took place of Appius Claudius, and a chamberlain that of the unblushing minister of his lusts, &c. It is not properly a familiar tragedy, but a court tragedy in the con-

*Dublinio si deve leggere questa opera, per che è  
stata ben scritta*

versational tone, to some parts of which the sword of state and the hat under the arm as essentially belong as to many French tragedies. Lessing wished to transplant the inevitable violence of the tyrannical Decemvir into the unrenowned circle of the principality of Massa Carara ; but as by taking a few steps we can extricate ourselves from so petty a territory, we in like manner, after a slight consideration, escape with the greatest ease from the assumption so laboriously planned by the poet ; on which, however, the necessity of the catastrophe wholly rests. The visible care which has been taken to assign a motive for every thing invites to a closer investigation, in which we are interrupted by none of the magical illusions of imagination : and this is an investigation which the internal unconnectedness of a drama, in the outward structure of which such an uncommon degree of understanding has been displayed, cannot possibly bear.

It is singular enough, that of all the dramatical works of Lessing, the last, *Nathan der Weise*, which he merely wrote with a view, as he says, to laugh at theologians, when his zeal for the improvement of the German theatre had pretty much cooled, should yet be the most conform to the genuine rules of art. A remarkable tale of Boccaccio is wrought up with a number of inventions which are wonderful, but yet not improbable, when we consider the circumstances of the times ; the fictitious persons are grouped round a celebrated historical character, the great Saladin, who is drawn with historical truth ; the crusades in the back ground, the scene



at Jerusalem, the meeting of persons of various nations and religions on this oriental soil,—all this gives to the work a romantic air, with which the thoughts, foreign to the age in question, that the poet has allowed himself to intersperse for the sake of his philosophical views, form a contrast somewhat hazardous indeed, but yet exceedingly attractive. The form is more free and comprehensive than in the other pieces of Lessing; it is nearly that of a drama of Shakspeare. He has here returned to the use of versification, which he had formerly rejected; not indeed the Alexandrine, for the discarding of which in the serious drama we are in every respect indebted to him, but the rhymeless Iambic. In *Nathan* the versification is often hard and carelessly labour-ed; but it is truly dialogical, and its advantageous influence may be easily traced when we compare the tone of this piece with the prose of the others. Had the developement of the truths which Lessing had particularly at heart not required too much repose, had there been more rapidity of motion in the action, the piece would also have been calculated to please on the stage. That Lessing, although he possessed so independent a mind, still allowed himself in his dramatical principles to be in some measure overcome by the general inclination of the age, I infer from this, that the number of imitators of *Nathan* were very few when compared with those of *Emilia Galotti*. Among the striking imitations of the style of the latter I will merely mention *Julius von Tarent*.

*Engel* must be considered as a scholar of Lessing.

His small after-pieces in the manner of Lessing are altogether insignificant; but his treatise on imitation (*Mimik*) shows the point to which the theory of his master leads. This book contains many useful observations on the first elements of the language of gesture: the grand error of the author was, that he considered it a complete system of mimicry or imitation, though it only treats of the expression of the passions, and does not contain a syllable on the subject of exhibition of character. Moreover, in his histrionic art he does not allow the least place for the idea of the tragic and comic; and it may easily be supposed that he rejects ideality of every kind,\* and merely requires a bare copy of nature.

The more I draw near to the present times the more I wish to give my observations a general direction, and to avoid entering into a minute criticism of works of living writers with part of whom I have been, or still am, in relations of friendship or hostility. I may yet, however, speak of the dramatic career of *Goethe* and *Schiller*, two men of whom our nation is proud, and whose intimate

\* Among other things Engel says, that as the language of Euripides, the latest, and in his opinion the most perfect Greek tragedian, has less elevation than that of his predecessors, it is probable, if the Greeks had carried tragedy to still higher perfection, that they would have proceeded a step farther, and dismissed verse altogether. So completely ignorant was Engel of the spirit of Grecian art. The approach which may certainly be traced in Euripides to the tone of common life is the very indication of the decline and impending destruction of tragedy: but even in comedy the Greeks never could bring themselves to make use of prose.

society has frequently enabled me to correct and enlarge my own ideas of art, with that frankness which is worthy of their great and disinterested endeavours. The errors which they occasioned at first when under the influence of erroneous principles, while they always continued to advance towards greater purity and brightness, are partly sunk already in oblivion, or will soon be so; their works will remain; in them we have at least the foundation of a dramatic school at once peculiarly German, and regulated by genuine principles of art.

Scarcely had Goethe, in *Werther*, given as it were a declaration of the rights of feeling in opposition to the constraint of social relations, when he protested in *Götz von Berlichingen*, by the example which he there set, against all the restraints of arbitrary rules by which dramatic poetry had been narrowed. In this play we do not see an imitation of Shakspeare, but the inspiration excited in a kindred mind by a creative genius. In the dialogue he practised Lessing's principles of nature, only with greater boldness; for besides the versification and all heightening ornaments, he also rejected the laws of written language to a degree of which we had had no former example. He wished to have no poetical circumlocution whatever; the exhibition was to be the very thing itself; and he thus allowed us to hear the tone of a remote age in a manner carrying with it a sufficient degree of illusion, at least for those who were unacquainted with the historical monuments in which our ancestors them-

selves speak. He has expressed the old German cordiality in the most moving manner: the situations which are announced in a few strokes are irresistibly powerful; the whole has a great historical sense, for it represents the conflict between a departing and a commencing age; between the century of rude but powerful independence, and the succeeding one of political tameness. The poet, in this composition, never seems to have had the representation on the stage in his eye; he rather indeed seems, in his youthful arrogance, to have set its insufficiency at defiance.

It seems, in general, to have been the grand object of Goethe to express his genius in his works, and to give new poetical animation to his age; he was indifferent as to the form, though he generally preferred the dramatic. He was at the same time a warm friend of the theatre, and sometimes laboured to comply with its wants as determined by custom and the taste of the time; as, for instance, in *Clavigo*, where he gave a familiar tragedy in the manner of Lessing. Among the other defects of this piece, the fifth act does not correspond with the others. In the four first acts Goethe adhered pretty closely to the relation of *Beaumarchais*, but he invented the catastrophe; and when we observe that it puts us strongly in mind of the burial of Ophelia, and the meeting of Hamlet and Laertes beside her grave, we have sufficiently expressed what a strong contrast it forms to the tone and colouring of the rest. In *Stella* Goethe took nearly the same liberty with the story of *Count von Gleichen*



which Lessing did with that of *Virginia*, but his labours were still more unsuccessful: the trait of the times of the crusades on which he founded his play is affecting, true-hearted, and even edifying; but *Stella* can only flatter the sentimentality of exhausted feeling.

At an after period he endeavoured to effect a reconciliation between his views of art and the common dramatic forms, even the subordinate, almost all of which he run through with single attempts. In his *Iphigenia* he expressed the spirit of the antique tragedy, according to his conceptions of it, especially with relation to repose, perspicuity, and ideality. With the same simplicity, flexibility, and noble elegance, he composed his *Tasso*, in which he applied a historical anecdote to mark the general signification of the contrast between a court and a poetical life. His *Egmont* again is a romantic and historical drama, the style of which steers a middle course between his first manner in *Götz*, and the form of Shakspeare. *Erwin und Elmire* and *Claudine von Villabella*, if I may say so, are ideal operettes, breathed out so lightly and airily that, with musical accompaniment and representation, they only run the risk of becoming heavy and prosaical; in this piece the noble and sustained style of the dialogue of his *Tasso*, is varied by the most tender songs. *Jery und Bätely* is a charming natural picture of Swiss manners and in the spirit and form of the best French operettes; *Scherz List und Rache* again is a true *opera buffa*, full of Italian *Lazzi*. *Die Mitschuldigen* is a comedy in rhyme,

in the manners of common life, according to the French rules. Goethe carried his condescension so far, that he even gave a continuation of an after-piece of Florian; and the impartiality of his taste so far, that he translated several tragedies of Voltaire for the German stage. Goethe's words and rhythm have always a golden resonance, but we cannot extol these pieces as successful translations; and indeed it would be matter of regret if that had succeeded which ought never to have been undertaken. It is not necessary to call in the aid of the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing to banish these unprofitable productions from the German soil; Goethe's own masterly parody of the French tragedy, in some scenes of *Esther*, will do this much more amusingly and effectually.

*Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* (The Triumph of Sentimentality) is a highly ingenious satire of Goethe's own imitators, and inclines to the arbitrary comic, and the fancifully symbolical of Aristophanes, but a modest Aristophanes in good company and at court. At a much earlier period Goethe had, in some of his merry tales and carnival plays, completely appropriated to himself the manner of our honest Hans Sachs.

We always recognise, in the whole of these transformations, the same free and powerful poetical spirit, to which we may safely apply the Homeric lines respecting Proteus:

Ἄλλ' ἤτοι πρῶτισσι λῆαν γένετ' ἠϋγένειος—

Γίνετο δ' ὑγρὸν ὕδωρ, καὶ δένδρεον ὑψιπέτηλον. *Odyss. lib. iv.*

A lion now, he curls a surgy mane;  
 Here from our strict embrace a stream he glides,  
 And last, sublime his stately growth he rears,  
 A tree, and well-dissembled foliage wears. POPE.\*

To the youthful epoch belongs his *Faust*, a work which was early planned, though it did not appear till a late period, and which even in its latest shape is still a fragment, and from its very nature perhaps it must always remain a fragment. It is hard to say whether we are here more lost in astonishment at the elevation which the poet frequently reaches, or seized with giddiness at the depths which he lays open to our sight. But this is not the place to express the whole of our admiration of this labyrinthical and boundless work, the peculiar creation of Goethe; we have merely to consider it in a dramatic point of view. The wonderful and popular story of Faustus is a subject peculiarly adapted for the theatre; and the *Marionette* play, from which

\* I have here quoted the translation of Pope, though nothing can well be more vapid and more unlike the original, which is literally, "First he became a lion with a huge mane—and then flowing water; and a tree with lofty foliage."—It would not perhaps be adviseable to recur to our earliest mode of classical translation, line for line, and nearly word for word; but when German literature shall be better known in England, it will be seen from the masterly versions of Voss and Schlegel, that without diluting by idle epithets one line into three, as in the above example, it is still possible to combine fidelity with spirit. The German translation quoted by Mr. Schlegel runs,

Erstlich ward er ein Leu mit fürchterlich rollender Mähne,  
 Floss dann als Wasser dahin, und rauscht' als Baum in den Wolken.

TRANS.

Goethe, after Lessing,\* took the first idea of a drama, satisfies our expectation even in the mutilated scenes and meagre words of ignorant puppet-show men. Goethe's work, which adheres in some points closely to the tradition, but which leaves it altogether in others, runs purposely out in all directions, beyond the dimensions of the theatre. Many scenes are standing delineations in long monologues, or conversations of Faustus's internal conditions, and dispositions, developements of his thoughts on the insufficiency of human knowledge, and the unsatisfactory lot of human nature; other scenes, though extremely ingenious and significant in themselves, possess, with respect to the progress of the action, an accidental appearance; many again, though very theatrically conceived, are merely slightly sketched: there are rhapsodical fragments without beginning and end, in which the poet allows us a surprising prospect, and then the curtain immediately drops; whereas in a dramatic poem, which is to carry the spectators along with it, the separate parts ought to be fashioned after the figure of the whole, so that we may say, each scene has its exposition, its intrigue, and winding up. Some scenes, full of the highest energy and overpowering pathos, for example, the murder of Valentine and Gretchen, and

\* Lessing has borrowed the only scenes of his plan which he communicates, namely where Faustus summons the evil spirits to select the quickest of them for his service, from the old piece which bears the showy title: *Infelix Prudentia*, or *Doctor Joannes Faustus*. Marlow had already composed a *Faustus* in England but unfortunately it has not been printed in Dodsley's Collection.



Faustus in the dungeon, prove that the poet was also a complete master of popular effect, and that he merely sacrificed it for the sake of more comprehensive views. He makes frequent calls on the imagination of his readers; nay, he compels them to supply immense moveable pictures, and such as no theatrical art is capable of bringing before the eye, by way of back ground for his flying groupes. To represent the *Faustus* of Goethe, we must possess Faustus' magic staff, and his formulæ of conjuration. With such an incapability of external exhibition, an astonishing deal is to be learned from this wonderful work, both in respect of plan and execution. In a prologue which was probably composed at a late period, the poet declares why, true to his genius, he could not accommodate himself to the demands of a mixed multitude of spectators, and writes in some measure a farewell letter to the theatre.

We are forced to allow that Goethe possesses the dramatic talent in a very high degree, but not so much theatrical talent. He is much more anxious to effect his object by tender developement than by rapid external motion; even the mild grace of his harmonious mind withheld him from endeavouring after a strong demagogical effect. *Iphigenia auf (in) Tauris* possesses, it is true, more affinity to the Grecian spirit, than perhaps any other work of the moderns composed before his time; but it is not so much an antique tragedy as a reflected image of it, a musical echo: its violent catastrophes appear here in the distance only as recollections, and

every thing is mildly resolved in the interior of the mind. The strongest and most overpowering pathos is to be found in *Elgmont*, but the conclusion of this tragedy is altogether removed from the external world into the province of an ideal music of the soul.

That Goethe, with this direction of his poetical career to the purest expression of his inspiration without any other regard, and on the part of art to a universality of studies, should not have had that decided influence on the shape of our theatre which he might have possessed, if he had actually chosen to dedicate himself exclusively and immediately to it, we may very easily conceive.

In the mean time, shortly after the first appearance of Goethe, the attempt to bring Shakspeare on our stage had been made. The effort was extraordinarily great. Actors who are still alive acquired the first wreaths of their renown in these exhibitions of a kind altogether new, and Schröder attained, perhaps, in some of the most celebrated tragic and comic parts, the same perfection for which Garrick had been idolised. The pieces, as wholes, appeared however in a very imperfect shape; in cumbersome prose translations, and frequently in mere extracts, with disfiguring alterations. The separate characters and situations had been to a certain degree hit, but by no means the sense of his composition.

Under these circumstances *Schiller* made his appearance, a man endowed with all the qualities for producing at once a strong effect on the multitude, and on minds of a nobler description. He

composed his earliest works while yet very young, and unacquainted with that world which he undertook to draw; and although a genius independent and bold even to daringness, he was however in various ways influenced by the models of Lessing, which we have mentioned, by the earlier labours of Goethe, and Shakspeare in so far as he could understand him without an acquaintance with the original.

In this way were the works of his youth produced: *Die Räuber* (The Robbers), *Cabale und Liebe*, and *Fiesco*. The first, wild and horrible as it was, produced such a powerful effect as even wholly to turn the heads of youthful enthusiasts. The defective imitation of Shakspeare is not to be mistaken: Francis Moor is a prosaical Richard the Third, ennobled by none of the properties which in the latter unite admiration with aversion. *Cabale und Liebe* can hardly affect us by its extravagant sentimentality, but it tortures us by the most painful impressions. *Fiesco* is in design the most perverted, in effect the feeblest.

So noble a mind could not long persevere in such errors, though they acquired him an applause which would have rendered the continuance of his blindness excusable. He had himself experienced the dangers of rudeness and an ungovernable defiance of all moderating discipline, and threw himself therefore, with incredible efforts and a sort of passion, into cultivation. The work which marks this new epoch is *Don Carlos*. In parts we may observe a great depth in the delineation of character; yet the old and tumid extravagance was not altogether lost,

but merely clothed with choicer forms. The situations have a great deal of pathetic power, the plot is complicated even to epigrammatic subtlety; but his dear won thoughts on human nature and social institutions were of such value in the eyes of the poet, that he exhibited them with circumstantial fulness, instead of expressing them by the progress of the action, and made his characters philosophise more or less on the subject of themselves and others, by which means his work swelled to a size altogether incompatible with the prescribed limits of the theatre.

Historical and philosophical studies seemed now to have seduced the poet for a time from the poetical career for the advantage of his art, to which he returned with a ripe mind, enriched with various knowledge, and at last truly enlightened with respect to his objects and his means. He applied himself now wholly to historical tragedy, and endeavoured, by divesting himself of his personality, to rise to truly objective exhibitions. In *Wallenstein* he had so conscientiously endeavoured to adhere to historical truth, that he could not become altogether the master of his materials, and an event of no great historical extent was spun out into two plays, and a prologue in some degree didactical. In the forms he adhered very closely to Shakspeare, only he endeavoured to confine the change of place and time within narrower limits, that he might not make too great a call on the imagination of the spectators. He tied himself also down to a more sustained tragical dignity, brought forward no persons of



mean condition, or at least did not allow them to speak in their natural tone, and banished into the prelude the people, here the army, which Shakspeare has introduced with such life and truth into the course of public events. The love between Thekla and Max Piccolomini is properly an episode, it is true, and bears the stamp of an age quite different from that delineated in the rest of the work; but it affords an opportunity for the most affecting scenes, and is conceived with equal tenderness and dignity.

*Maria Stuart* is planned and executed with greater skill in art, and also with greater solidity. All is wisely weighed; we may censure separate parts as offensive, the quarrel for instance between the two queens, the wild fury of Mortimer's passion, &c.; but we shall hardly be able to take any thing out of its place without involving the whole in confusion. The effect is infallible; the last scenes of Mary are truly worthy of a queen; religious impressions are introduced with due seriousness; only from the care, perhaps superfluous, of exercising poetical justice on Elizabeth after Mary's death, the spectator is dismissed in a state of mind rather approaching to cool indifference.

With such a wonderful subject as the *Maid of Orleans*, Schiller thought himself entitled to take greater liberties. The plot is looser; the scene with Montgomery, an epic intermixture, is at variance with the general tone; in the singular and inconceivable appearance of the black knight, the object of the poet is ambiguous; in the character of Talbot,

and many other parts, Schiller has entered into a competition with Shakspeare without success; and I know not whether the colouring employed, which is not even so brilliant as might be imagined, is an equivalent for the severer pathos which has thereby been lost. The history of the Maid of Orleans is most accurately vouched; the high mission was believed by herself and generally by her contemporaries, and produced the most extraordinary effects. The wonder might therefore have been represented by the poet, even though the sceptical spirit of his contemporaries should have deterred him from giving it out for real; and the true ignominious martyrdom of the betrayed and abandoned heroine would have agitated us more deeply than the gaudy and rose-coloured one which Schiller has invented for her in contradiction to history. Shakspeare's exhibition, though partial from his national point of view, still possesses much more historical truth and profundity. However, the German piece will always remain a beautiful attempt to save the honour of a name dishonoured by impudent ridicule; and its dazzling effect, supported by the rich ornaments of the language, deservedly gained for it the most distinguished success on the stage.

I am least disposed to approve of the principles which Schiller followed in *The Bride of Messina*, and which he himself declares in his preface. The investigation, however, would lead me too far into the province of theory. It was intended for a tragedy, antique in its form, but romantic in substance. A story altogether fictitious is kept in a costume so

indefinite and so divested of all inward probability, that the picture is neither truly ideal nor truly natural, neither mythological nor historical. The romantic poetry seeks indeed to blend things the most remote from each other into one, but it cannot admit of things which are altogether incompatible with each other ; the way of thinking of the people exhibited cannot be at once Pagan and Christian. I will not complain of him for borrowing openly as he has done ; the whole is composed of two principal ingredients, of the story of Eteocles and Polynices, who, notwithstanding the mediation of their mother Jocaste, contend for the sole possession of the throne, and of the brothers impelled by jealousy in love to fratricide, in the *Zwillingen von Klinger*, and in *Julius von Tarent*. In the introduction of the chorusses also, though they possess much lyrical sublimity and beautiful passages, the sense of the ancients has been totally mistaken ; as to each of the hostile brothers a peculiar chorus is partially attached, the one contending against the other, they both cease to be a true chorus ; that is, a voice of sympathy and contemplation elevated above every personal consideration.

The last of Schiller's works, *Wilhelm Tell*, is also in my opinion the best. Here he has wholly returned to the poetry of history ; the manner in which he has handled his subject is true, cordial, and when we consider Schiller's ignorance of Swiss nature and manners, wonderful in point of local truth. It is true he had here a noble source to draw from in the speaking pictures of the im-

mortal John Müller. In the view of Tell's chapel on the banks of the lake of Lucerni, in the open air, and with the Alps for a back ground, this picture of heart-elevating, old German manners, piety, and true heroism, might have merited a representation as a solemnization of Swiss freedom, five hundred years after its foundation.

Schiller was in the most mature fulness of his mind when he was carried off by an untimely death; up to the moment of which his health, which had long been undermined, was always made to yield to his powerful will, and completely exhausted in the most praise-worthy endeavours. How much might he not have still performed, as he dedicated himself exclusively to the theatre, and with every work attained a higher mastery of his art! He was a virtuous artist in the genuine sense of the word; he worshiped the true and the beautiful with purity of mind, and to his indefatigable endeavours to reach them he offered up his own existence as a sacrifice, far from petty self-love, and from the jealousy but too common even among artists of excellence.

The appearance of great original minds in Germany has always been followed by a host of imitators, and hence both Goethe and Schiller have been the occasion, for the most part, not from any fault of their own, of bringing a number of defective and degenerate productions on our stage.

*Götz Von Berlichingen* was followed by a whole inundation of *chivalrous plays*, in which there was nothing historical but the names and other external circumstances, nothing chivalrous but the helmets,



bucklers, and swords, and nothing of old German honesty but the supposed rudeness: the sentiments were as modern as they were vulgar. From chivalry pieces they became true cavalry pieces, which certainly deserve to be acted by horses rather than by men. To those also who in some measure appeal to the imagination by superficial allusions to former times, may be applied what I said of one of the most admired of them:

Mit Harsthörnern, und Burgen, und Harnischen, pranget Johanna;  
Traun! mir gefiele das Stück, Wären nicht Worte dabey.\*

The next place in the public favour has been held by the *family picture* and the *affecting drama*, two secondary species, from the encouragement of which by precept and example Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller (the two last by their earliest compositions *Stella*, *Clavigo*, *Die Geschwister*, *Cabale und Liebe*), cannot be acquitted. I will name no one, but merely suppose that two writers of some talent and theatrical knowledge had dedicated themselves to these species, that they had both mistaken the essence of dramatic poetry, and laid down to themselves a pretended moral aim; but that to the one morality had appeared merely under the confined shape of economy, and to the other in that of sensibility: what sort of fruits would thus be brought forth, and how would the applause of the multitude finally decide between these two competitors?

\* Johanna makes a show with horns, castles, and armour;  
The piece would certainly please me, were it without words.

The family picture must portray the every day course of the middle ranks of society. The extraordinary events which are produced by intrigues will be banished: to cover this want of motion the writer will have recourse to a characterization wholly individual, to which a practised player may give a certain truth, but which cleaves to external peculiarities as a bad portrait painter endeavours to attain a resemblance by scars of the small pox and warts, and by the manner of dressing and tying the handkerchief: the motives and situations will sometimes be humorous and droll, but never truly diverting, as the serious and prosaical aim which is always kept in view completely prevents this. The rapid determinations of comedy generally end before the family life begins, by which all is fixed in every day habits. To make œconomy poetical is impossible: the dramatic family painter will be able to say as little of a fortunate and tranquil domestic establishment, as the historian of a state in possession of external and internal tranquillity. He will therefore be obliged to interest us by the painful accuracy of his picture of the torments and the penury of domestic life: chagrin experienced in the honest exercise of office, in the education of children, interminable dissensions between husband and wife, the bad conduct of servants, and, above all things, the cares of subsistence. The spectators understand these pictures but too well, for every man knows where the shoe pinches him; it may be very salutary for them, that they should each run over in thought every week, in presence of the stage, the

relation between their expenditure and income ; but elevation of mind and recreation they will hardly derive there, for they find again on the stage the very same thing which they have at home from morning to night.

The sentimental poet again contrives to lighten their heart. His general doctrine amounts properly to this, that what is called a good heart atones for all errors and extravagances, and that with respect to virtue we are not to insist so strictly on principles. Allow only free scope to your natural impulses, he seems to say to his spectators ; see how well it becomes my *naïve* girls, when they confess every thing of themselves. If he only knows how to corrupt by means of effeminate emotions, rather sensual than moral, but at the end to make all nearly even, by the introduction of some generous benefactor, who showers out his liberality with open hands, he then pleases the vitiated hearts of his audience in an extraordinary degree ; they feel as if they had themselves done noble actions, without however putting their hands in their own pockets : all is drawn from the purse of the generous poet. The affecting species can hardly therefore fail in the long run to gain a victory over the œconomical ; and this has actually been the case in Germany. But what in these dramas is painted to us not only as natural and allowable, but even as moral and dignified, exceeds all imagination, and this seduction is much more dangerous than that of the licentious comedy, for this very reason, that it does not disgust us by external indecency, but steals into unguarded

minds, and selects the most sacred names for a disguise.

The poetical as well as moral decline of the taste of the time has been attended with this consequence, that the writers who are the greatest favourites on the stage seek only for a momentary applause, regardless of the opinion of good judges, and of true esteem; those however who have both in higher aims before their eyes cannot prevail on themselves to comply with the demands of the multitude, and when they do compose dramatically, are wholly regardless of the stage. Hence they remain defective in the theatrical part of art, which can only be attained in perfection by practice and experience.

The repertory of our stage exhibits therefore, in its miserable wealth, a motley assemblage of chivalrous pieces, family pictures, and sentimental dramas, which are occasionally, though seldom, varied by works in a grander and more cultivated style by Shakspeare and Schiller. In this state of things translations and imitations of foreign novelties, and especially of the French after-pieces and operettes are indispensable. From the worthlessness of the separate works, the fleeting charm of novelty is alone sought for in theatrical entertainment, to the great injury of the histrionic art, as a number of insignificant parts must be got by heart in the most hurried manner, to be immediately forgotten.\*

\* To this must be added, by way of rendering the vulgarity of our theatre almost incurable, the radically depraved disposition of every thing having any reference to the theatre. The



The efforts of the poets who do not labour immediately for the theatre take every variety of direction; in this as in other departments may be

companies of actors ought to be under the management of intelligent judges and persons practised in the dramatic art, and not themselves players. Engel presided for a time over the Berlin theatre, and eye-witnesses universally assert that he elevated it to an unusual height. What Goethe has effected in the management of the theatre of Weimar, in a small town, and with small means, is known to all good theatrical judges in Germany. Rare talents he can neither create nor reward, but he accustoms the actors to order and discipline, to which they are generally altogether disinclined, and thereby gives to his representations a unity and harmony, which we do not witness on larger theatres, where every individual plays as his own fancy prompts him. The incorrect manner in which their parts are got by heart, and the imperfection of their oral delivery, I have elsewhere censured. I have heard verses mutilated by a celebrated player in a manner which would at Paris be considered unpardonable in a beginner. I know that in a certain theatre, when they were under the melancholy necessity of representing a piece in verse, they wrote out the parts as prose, that the players might not be disturbed in their darling but stupid affectation of nature, by observation of the quantity. How many "periwig pated fellows" (as Shakspeare called such people), must we suffer, who imagine they are affording the public an enjoyment when they straddle along the boards with their awkward persons, considering the words which the poet has given them to repeat merely as a necessary evil. Our players are less anxious to please than the French. By the creation of standing national theatres as they are called, by which in several capitals people suppose that they have done something advantageous, and likely to improve the histrionic art, they have on the contrary put a complete end to all competition. They bestow on the players exclusive privileges, they secure their salaries for life; having now nothing to dread from more accomplished rivals, and being independent of the fluctuating favour of the spectators, the only concern of the actors is to enjoy their places like so many bene-

observed the fermentation of ideas that has brought on our literature in foreign countries the reproach of a chaotic anarchy, in which however the striving

fices in the most convenient manner. Hence the national theatres have become true hospitals for languor and laziness. The question of Hamlet with respect to the players, "Do they grow rusty?" will never become obsolete,—it must alas! be always answered in the affirmative. The actor, from the ambiguous relations in which he lives (which cannot be altered, as they exist in the nature of things), must possess a certain extravagant enthusiasm for his art, if he is to perform any thing extraordinary. He cannot be too passionately alive to noisy applause, reputation, and every brilliant reward, derived immediately from his efforts. The present moment is his kingdom, time is his most dangerous enemy, as he can exhibit nothing of a durable nature. Whenever he is filled with the tradesman-like anxiety of securing a moderate maintenance for himself, his wife, and children, there is an end of all improvement. We do not mean to say that the old age of deserving artists ought not to be provided for. But to those players who from age, illness, or other accidents, have lost their qualifications for acting, we ought to give pensions to induce them to leave off instead of continuing to play. In general we ought not to put it into the heads of the players, that they are such important and indispensable personages. Nothing is more rare than a truly great player; but nothing is more common than the qualifications for filling characters in the manner we generally see them filled: of this we may be convinced in every private theatre, in any thing like an intelligent circle. Finally, the relation which subsists with us between the managers of theatres and writers, is also as detrimental as possible. In France and England, the author of a piece has a determinate share of the profits of each representation; this procures for him a permanent income, whenever any of his pieces are so successful as to keep their place on the theatre. Again, if the piece is unsuccessful, he receives nothing. In Germany, the managers of theatres pay a certain sum before-hand, and at their own risk, for the manuscripts which they receive. They may thus be very considerable losers; and on the other hand, if the piece is extra-

after a higher aim never yet reached is sufficiently visible.

The more profound investigation of *Æsthetics* has among the Germans, by nature more a speculative than a practical people, led to this consequence, that works of art, and tragedies more especially, have been executed on abstract theories more or less misunderstood. It was natural that these tragedies should produce no effect on the theatre ;—nay, they are in general unsusceptible of representation, and possess no inward life.

Others again have, with true feeling, appropriated the spirit of the ancient tragedians, and sought the most suitable manner of accommodating the simple and pure forms of art of antiquity to the constitution of our scene.

Men truly distinguished for their talents have attached themselves to the romantic drama, but they have generally taken it in a latitude which is only allowable in the romance, without concerning themselves with the compression which the dramatic form necessarily requires. Or they have seized only the musically fanciful and picturesquely sportive side of the Spanish dramas, without their firm keeping, their energetical power, and their theatrical effect.

ordinarily successful, the author is not suitably rewarded.—  
AUTHOR.

The Author is under a mistake with respect to the reward which falls to the share of the dramatic writer in England. He has not a part of the profits of each representation. If the play runs three nights, it brings him in as much as if it were to run three thousand nights.—TRANS.

What path shall we now enter? Shall we endeavour to re-accustom ourselves to the form of the French tragedy, which we have so long banished? Repeated experience has proved that, with every modification from the manner of translation and the tone of representation, as some modification is indispensable, even in the hands of a Goethe or a Schiller, it never can attain any great success.

The genuine imitation of the Greek tragedy is more related to our way of thinking; but it is beyond the comprehension of the multitude, and must always remain a learned enjoyment of art for a few cultivated minds, like the contemplation of ancient statues.

In comedy, Lessing has already remarked the difficulty of introducing national manners which are not provincial, as the tone of social life with us is not modelled after a common central point. If we wish pure comedies, I would strongly recommend the use of rhyme; perhaps with the more artificial form they might also gradually assume a peculiarity of substance.

It appears to me, however, that this is not the most urgent want: let us first finish in a worthy manner the serious and higher species of the German character. In this it appears to me that our taste inclines altogether to the romantic. What most attracts the multitude in our half sentimental, half humorous dramas, which one moment transport us to Peru, and the next to Kamschatka, and soon after into the times of chivalry, while the sentiments are



all modern and lachrymose, is always a sprinkling of the romantic, which we even recognize in the most insipid magical operas. The signification of this species has been lost with us before it was properly found; the fancy has passed with the inventors of such chimeras, and the views of the plays are sometimes wiser than those of their authors. In a hundred play-bills the name romantic is profaned by being lavished on rude and monstrous abortions; let us be permitted by criticism and history to elevate it again to its true signification. We have lately endeavoured in many ways to revive the remains of our old national poetry. These may afford the poet a foundation for the wonderful festival-play; but the most dignified species of the romantic is the historical.

In this field the noblest laurels may be reaped by those dramatic poets who wish to emulate Goethe and Schiller. Still, however, let our historical drama be in reality universally national; let it not attach itself to the life and adventures of single knights and petty princes, who had no influence on the whole nation. Let it at the same time be truly historical, drawn from a profound knowledge, and let us transport ourselves wholly back to the great times of old. In this glass let the poet enable us to see, though to our deep shame, what the Germans were in former times, and what they must again be. Let him impress it strongly on our hearts, that we Germans, if we do not consider the lessons of history better than we have hitherto done, are in

danger—we, formerly the first and most glorious people of Europe, whose freely elected Prince was acknowledged without opposition for the head of all Christendom—of disappearing altogether from the list of independent nations. The higher ranks, by their predilection for foreign manners, by their zeal for the mental cultivation of other nations, which must always yield a miserable fruit, transplanted from their natural climate into a hot-house, have long alienated themselves from the body of the people ; still longer, for three centuries at least, has internal dissension consumed our noblest powers in civil wars, the ruinous consequences of which are now first beginning to disclose themselves. May all who have an opportunity of influencing the public mind exert themselves to extinguish at last the old misunderstanding, and to rally all the well-disposed round the objects of reverence which unfortunately have been abandoned ; (but by true attachment to which our forefathers acquired so much happiness and renown), as round a consecrated banner, and to let them feel their indestructible unity as Germans ! What a picture is afforded by our history from the most remote times, the wars with the Romans down to the fixed formation of the German empire ! Then the chivalrously brilliant interval of the house of Hohenstaufen, and lastly, what is of more political importance, and more nearly concerns us, of the house of Hapsburg, which has produced so many great princes and heroes. What a field for a poet who, like Shakspeare, could

discern the poetical side of the great events of the world! But we, Germans, take always so little interest in our most important national affairs, that even the mere historical exhibition of these great events is still very far behind.

THE END.













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